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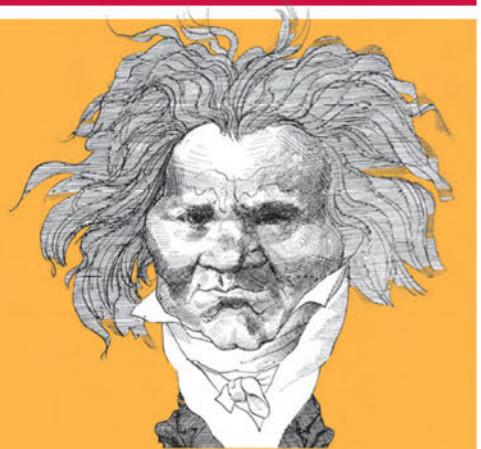


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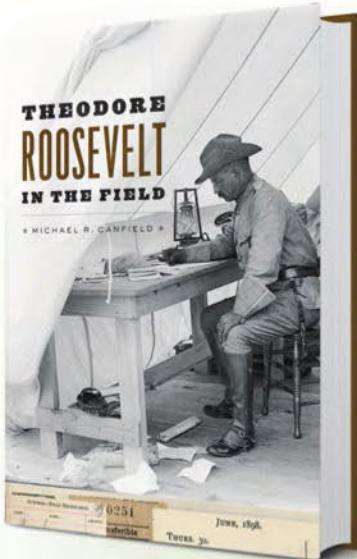


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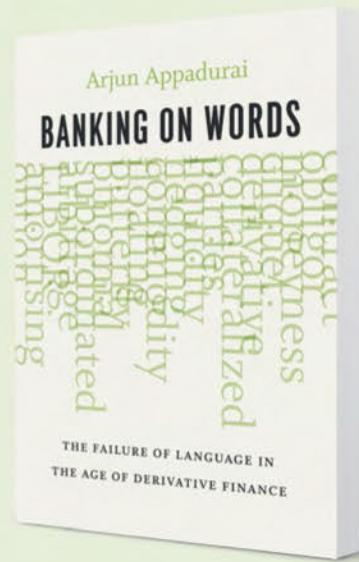
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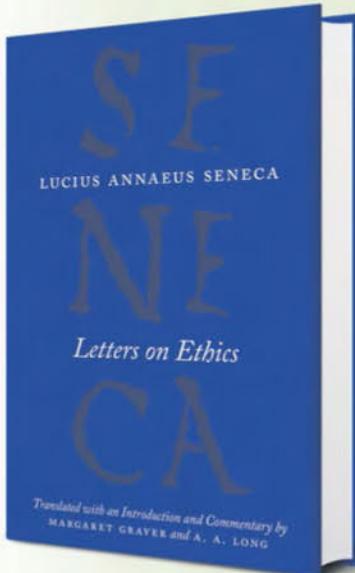
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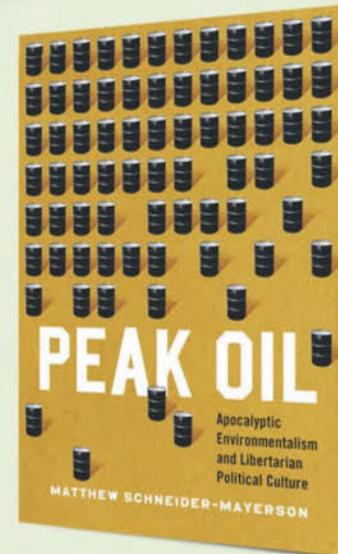


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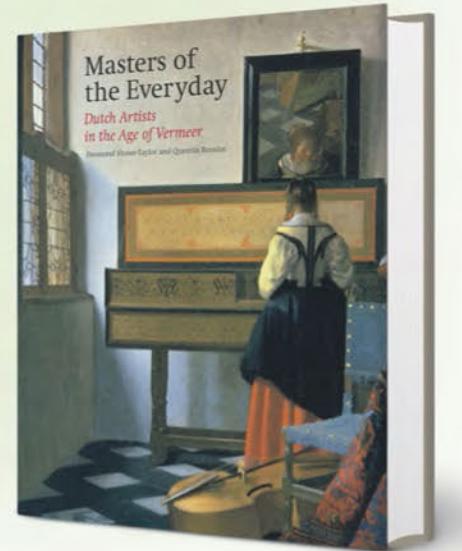
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Contents

4	David Bromwich	<i>Ernest Hemingway: Between Two Wars</i> an exhibition at the Morgan Library and Museum, New York City, September 25, 2015–January 31, 2016
8	Julia Preston	<i>Mexicans in the Making of America</i> by Neil Foley
		<i>A Nation of Nations: A Great American Immigration Story</i> by Tom Gjelten
		<i>The Latino Generation: Voices of the New America</i> by Mario T. García
		<i>Latino America: How America's Most Dynamic Population Is Poised to Transform the Politics of the Nation</i> by Matt Barreto and Gary M. Segura
14	Jed S. Rakoff	<i>The Court and the World: American Law and the New Global Realities</i> by Stephen Breyer
18	Daniel Mendelsohn	<i>A Little Life</i> by Hanya Yanagihara
21	John Demos	<i>The Witches: Salem, 1692</i> by Stacy Schiff
24	Jonathan Steele	<i>Satan and Salem: The Witch-Hunt Crisis of 1692</i> by Benjamin C. Ray
28	Ingrid D. Rowland	<i>Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War</i> by Michael M. Gunter
30	Marcia Angell	<i>Salomé</i> by Oscar Wilde, adapted and directed by Yaël Farber
		<i>The Nuremberg Code</i> issued by the Nuremberg tribunal
		<i>The Declaration of Helsinki</i> issued by the World Medical Association
		<i>The Common Rule (Title 45, Part 46, Subpart A, Code of Federal Regulations)</i> issued by the US Department of Health and Human Services
		<i>The Ethics Police?: The Struggle to Make Human Research Safe</i> by Robert L. Klitzman
33	Francine Prose	<i>I Can Give You Anything But Love</i> by Gary Indiana
35	Max Rodenbeck	<i>Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now</i> by Ayaan Hirsi Ali
40	George B. Stauffer	<i>Beethoven's Symphonies: An Artistic Vision</i> by Lewis Lockwood
44	Phillip Lopate	<i>The Lost Landscape: A Writer's Coming of Age</i> by Joyce Carol Oates
		<i>The Sacrifice</i> by Joyce Carol Oates
		<i>Jack of Spades: A Tale of Suspense</i> by Joyce Carol Oates
46	Peter Brooks	'The Mysteries of Paris'
47	Patrick Vinton Kirch	<i>Paradise of the Pacific: Approaching Hawai'i</i> by Susanna Moore
50	Jim Holt	<i>Mathematics Without Apologies: Portrait of a Problematic Vocation</i> by Michael Harris
53	Adam Kirsch	<i>Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer</i> by Charles Marsh
55	James Walton	<i>The Bone Clocks</i> by David Mitchell
		<i>Slade House</i> by David Mitchell
59	Gregory Hays	<i>Introducing the Ancient Greeks: From Bronze Age Seafarers to Navigators of the Western Mind</i> by Edith Hall
62	Colin B. Bailey	<i>Paul Durand-Ruel: Memoirs of the First Impressionist Art Dealer (1831–1922)</i> revised, corrected, and annotated by Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel
		<i>Inventing Impressionism: Paul Durand-Ruel and the Modern Art Market</i> catalog of a recent exhibition at the Musée du Luxembourg, Paris, the National Gallery, London, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, edited by Sylvie Patry
66	Roger Lowenstein	<i>The Summit: Bretton Woods, 1944: J. M. Keynes and the Reshaping of the Global Economy</i> by Ed Conway
69	Richard Pipes	<i>On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics</i> by Sheila Fitzpatrick
71	Richard Holmes	<i>Those Who Write for Immortality: Romantic Reputations and the Dream of Lasting Fame</i> by H. J. Jackson
		<i>Eternity's Sunrise: The Imaginative World of William Blake</i> by Leo Damrosch
		<i>Poems by William Blake</i> , selected and introduced by Patti Smith
74	Letters from	Morris Dickstein, Noam Chomsky and nineteen others, and Jefferson Morley

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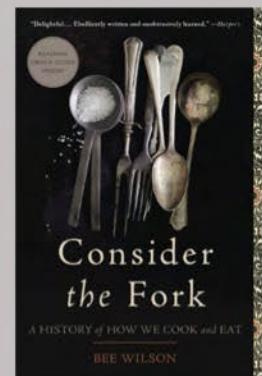
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A Hemingway Surprise

Ernest Hemingway: Between Two Wars
an exhibition at the Morgan Library and Museum, New York City, September 25, 2015–January 31, 2016

David Bromwich

In the early photographs, Hemingway has a bold expression—stepping forward, saying “This is *me*”—accompanied by a squint that holds the camera at a certain distance. The attitude stops short of an available emotion. Toward the end of his career he would grow used to hearing himself demoted for an excess of surface and showmanship, as if his identification with the roles of celebrity, sportsman, and revolutionist, the friend of boxers and movie stars, implied a distrust of literature itself. This criticism was a plausible half-truth. At heart, he was a listener, and to a large extent a mimic, with the intellect to judge and sift the voices that he heard. Of all the moderns, Hemingway was the foremost defender of revision as a proof of serious craft. The more you could throw away, he said, the surer you could be that something of substance was there to begin with.

As the wonderful exhibition at the Morgan Library makes clear, with its generous sample of photographs, books, corrected proof pages, and letters to and from the writer, Hemingway was already ambitious for fame in his teenage years in Oak Park, Illinois. His adolescent pieces show a strong pull toward genre fiction of the “boy’s adventure” type. (In his *Paris Review* interview with George Plimpton, he would rank “the good Kipling” and Captain Marryat alongside Thoreau, Twain, Turgenev, Mozart, Bruegel, and Cézanne among the artists he had “learned the most from.”) A fondness for boyish subject matter and excitement would never leave him; you can see it in the keyed-up manly dialogue and fast melodrama of his play *The Fifth Column*.

But though Hemingway disliked “the trauma theory of literature,” especially as applied to himself, a particular grown-up experience seems to have formed him as much as any experience after childhood can do that for a writer. He was wounded in an Austrian trench mortar attack on July 8, 1918. His stories about soldiers who are recovering from battle injuries—“In Another Country,” “Now I Lay Me,” and “A Way You’ll Never Be,” all of them extraordinary work—introduced and brought to perfection a style that nothing in English had prepared his readers for.

In the last of these stories, Nick Adams (as usual a stand-in for the author) rides his bicycle past the scene of a battle and “saw what had happened by the position of the dead.” This opening is followed by a one-sentence para-

graph: “They lay alone or in clumps in the high grass of the field and along the road, their pockets out, and over them were flies and around each body or group of bodies were the scattered papers.” The next paragraph is a straightforward panorama of the dead, their weapons and debris—most of it done with semicolons, occasionally jostled by a comma splice to break the rhythm—the juddering syntax here keeping time with the hurried motions of the soldiers digging in. Already in these stories of the 1920s, what we are seeing is a discipline peculiar to Hemingway—a method of description that becomes a record of repressed emotion. The force of absent things and feelings is made

dialogue between Nick and his father tries to absorb the shock:

“Is dying hard, Daddy?”
“No, I think it’s pretty easy,
Nick. It all depends.”

Somewhere in this part, Hemingway had set to work on sentences to describe Nick’s fear: “He was not afraid of anything definite as yet. But he was getting very frightened afraid. Then all suddenly he was afraid of dying.” There is visible art in the substitution of “afraid” for “frightened”—taking the stronger and more grown-up word to repeat the fear—and in the deflection of the cliché “all of a sudden”; but the interesting thing when you look at the published story is that none of this passage was used. The narrator,

which “Indian Camp” first appeared, had been the basis of his reputation in Paris and New York, where he was known as an avant-garde writer. *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), written in six weeks in a rush of self-confidence he would never equal, brought him a larger fame. Edmund Wilson wrote on January 7, 1927, in a letter displayed at the Morgan: “I think your book is a knockout—perhaps the best piece of fiction that any American of this new crop has done.”

Within a few years, still in his early thirties, Hemingway was being sought by a scarcely younger generation for advice as a master of fiction. His reading list for Arnold Samuels, a visitor to Key West in the spring of 1934, shows

a mixture of classical touchstones and near-contemporary favorites that is touchingly personal: two stories by Stephen Crane, “The Blue Hotel” and “The Open Boat,” get an honorary place beside Flaubert and Dostoevsky and Henry James. Also on the list are Somerset Maugham, *Of Human Bondage*; George Moore, *Hail and Farewell*; W. H. Hudson, *Far Away and Long Ago*; and E. E. Cummings, *The Enormous Room*.

By the mid-1930s, Hemingway was admired by writers of English prose with a fealty most unusual in the arts. A letter from John Steinbeck praises “The Butterfly and the Tank,” a story of the Spanish civil war published in 1938 in *Esquire*, but Steinbeck

must have been looking for an excuse to write his letter. The story is hardly even a story but rather an anecdote, given in Hemingway’s person as something that happened to him: a homosexual, in an access of high spirits, uses a “flit gun” to spray with cologne a waiter at Chico’s in Madrid (“a place sort of like The Stork, without the music and the debutantes”) and in retaliation is shot dead. The magic, for Steinbeck, must have been that Hemingway was the one who saw it and told it.

This was much the effect of, say, things that happened to and were told by Lord Byron in 1818. There was glamour in the very idea of such an author, and there was something else: an adaptation to the uses of writing as a transcription of the glamour. This degree of charismatic attraction has rarely been seen in literature, and it can occur only when an author and audience are agreed on the worth of anything that happens to one of us.

It is sometimes forgotten how far behind Hemingway left America once he went off to World War I and settled in Paris. He wrote and fought against the Fascists in the Spanish war; covered D-Day in a landing craft for *Collier’s*; took part in the liberation of Paris; and declared his sympathy for Castro’s revolution against the dictator Fulgencio Batista. He felt himself no more a foreigner in Cuba, Spain, or Paris



Ernest Hemingway and Agnes von Kurowsky, the American nurse who was the inspiration for the character of Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms*, Milan, 1918

more powerful by a minimal rendering of present details.

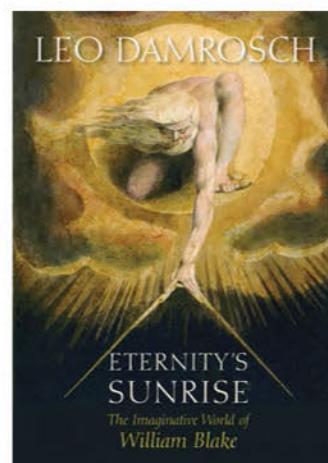
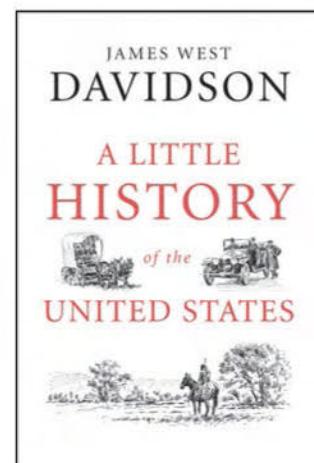
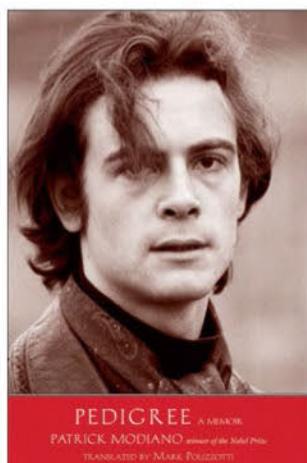
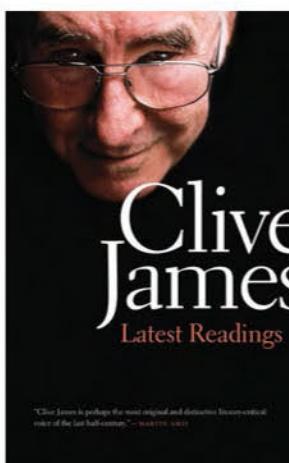
James Joyce, in stories from *Dubliners* like “An Encounter” or “After the Race,” may have supplied a clue to the method, but Hemingway pushed it further, and the documents at the Morgan all frame a question: How did he do it? His advance was partly owing to a canny choice of mentors: Joyce, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein. With a pedagogic sense of purpose, Stein above all took an early interest in his work, and responded to a sheaf of novice stories with a note of severe encouragement that mattered greatly to Hemingway: “Begin over again and concentrate.”

Of his patience and the reward for his new beginning, a vivid illustration may be found in the manuscript revisions of the story “Indian Camp.” Nick Adams’s father, who is a doctor, has brought him along to deliver a baby. The Indian woman has been in labor for two days, and his father cuts her open, gets the baby to start breathing, stitches her up, and moves to inform the “proud father” only to discover that he has slit his throat. The man’s helplessness to relieve her screams, and perhaps horror and mortification at the sight of the doctor’s work, have been too much for him. A nervous stretch of

as a knowing and explaining presence, has dissolved, first into the passage of straight dialogue and finally into a more indirect report of Nick’s very different afterthoughts. As he returns home with his father, the story closes in a dramatic non sequitur matched to a psychological truth: “In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die.”

Among other instances of a similar paring down are some draft pages of “Big Two-Hearted River” and a specimen of the four thousand words with which *The Sun Also Rises* had originally begun—two entire chapters that were cut on F. Scott Fitzgerald’s advice. Hemingway had been too intrusive with his opinions of people and his worldly wisdom, and the effect was overbearing, a trespass against the reader’s freedom to trust the author at his own pace. In later years he mainly erred when he showed he loved the sound of his voice—a traceable weakness in *Green Hills of Africa*, and in some of his letters, with their profusion of nicknames for friends and cronies, wives and lovers. But he knew that Fitzgerald’s was the sound advice of a fellow artist, and he adopted a smaller suggestion from the same source to cut an “inside” boxing anecdote from the story “Fifty Grand.”

In Our Time (1925), the sequence of paragraph-sketches and stories in



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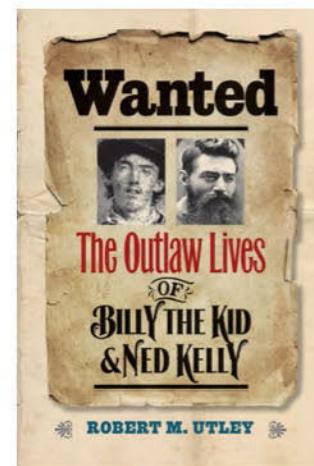
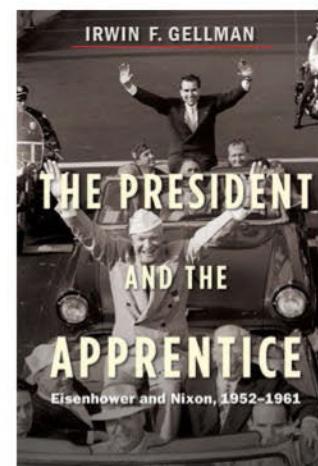
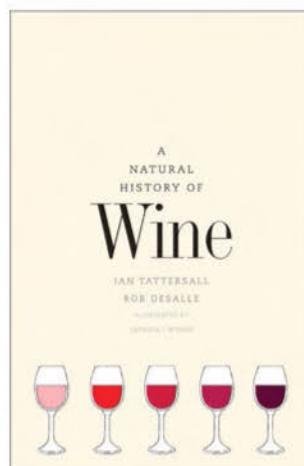
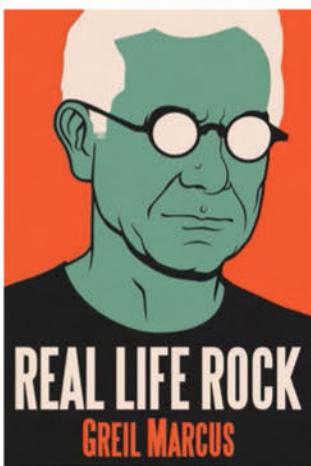
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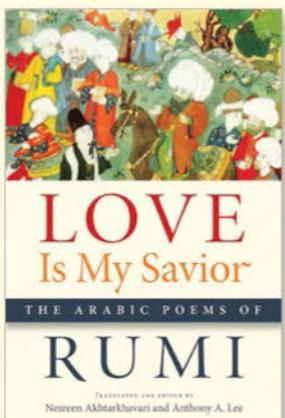
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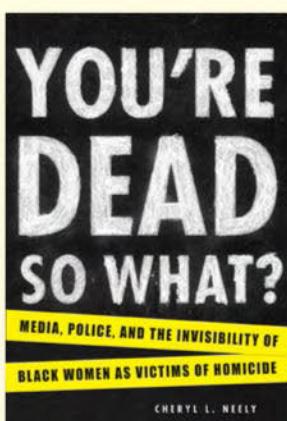
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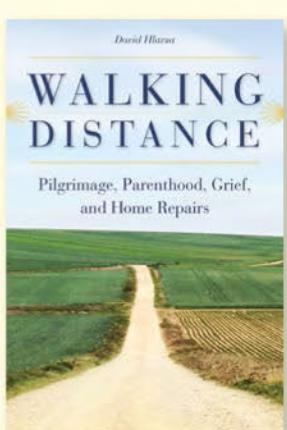


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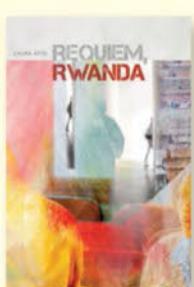
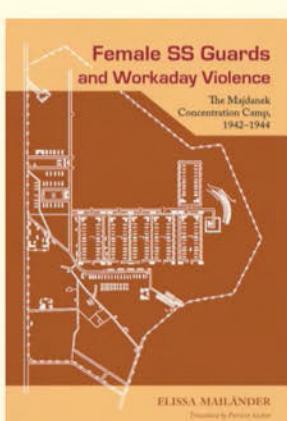


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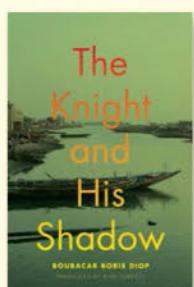
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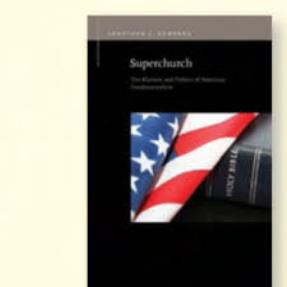
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than he was in Key West or Ketchum, Idaho. Concerning Oak Park he wrote, in a letter to Mary Welsh: "Never have been back except to bury my Father that same fall [of 1928]. Since, many time[s], I haven't gone because it would be rude to go and not see my mother and I can't stand to see her."

The respectable middle class in America, so young in its culture and censorious in its demands, was the power he fled his parents to escape; and in the life that followed, he would alienate himself from any system that ventured to limit his freedom. As he explained to his father in a letter of March 20, 1925, the aim of his work was to recall and intensify a sensation of sheer contact with life:

You see I'm trying in all my stories to get the feeling of the actual life across—not to just depict life—or criticize it—but to actually make it alive. So that when you have read something by me you actually experience the thing. You can't do this without putting in the bad and the ugly as well as what is beautiful. Because if it is all beautiful you can't believe in it. Things aren't that way.... So when you see anything of mine that you don't like remember that I'm sincere in doing it and that I'm working toward something. If I write an ugly story that might be hateful to you or to Mother the next one might be one that you would like exceedingly.

The "ugly story" might of course involve a real experience he had been through with his father, as in "Indian Camp," or things that his father and mother would recognize but pronounce unfit for literature. Hemingway, as much as D. H. Lawrence, wanted to clear away the imputation of ugliness that came from daring to speak of such things at all.

The most interesting letter from another writer shown at the Morgan exhibition was sent by J. D. Salinger (signing himself Jerry) after the Battle of Hurtgenwald. On July 27, 1945, "from a General Hospital in Nuremberg," where he is hoping to circumvent a "mental" discharge, Salinger writes to thank Hemingway for encouraging words in a recent conversation. Some way under the surface, this letter is also a confession of indebtedness and a plea for friendship. "They asked me about my sex life," writes Salinger of his interrogation by the army psychiatrists, "... and about my childhood... and then finally they asked me how I liked the army. I've always liked the army." Those two sentences are a Hemingway cadence followed by a Hemingway punch line. Who could "like" the army? "I hope," Salinger continues, "the next time you come to New York that I'll be around and that if you have time I can see you. The talks I had with you were the only hopeful minutes of the whole

business." The last phrase is Hemingway's kind of understatement: the business alluded to may mean everything after the invasion of Europe or everything about his stay in the mental ward.

And this was always part of Hemingway's teaching. Omit the right details and you will get through to the readers who were meant to understand. The boxing story "Fifty Grand" suppresses the crucial transaction in which the fighter Jack Brennan agrees to throw a fight he doubts he could win anyway. After the fixers have come and gone from the camp, his decision is telegraphed by nothing but these lines:

Upstairs Jack sat on the bed with his head in his hands.

"Ain't it a life?" Jack says.

Hemingway's titles are also subdued in their reference and often quietly didactic. *The Sun Also Rises* juxtaposes the dismissal by Gertrude Stein of "a lost generation" with the line out of Ecclesiastes. Less obvious is the allusion of *In Our Time* to the saying from the Book of Common Prayer, "Give peace in our time, O Lord." The mockery was aimed at readers in search of a jolt from war stories, and also at President Wilson with his pledge of "a war to end all wars." There is apparent peace, in these stories, but no time of peace: a memory or underplot of violence infects even the scenes of contentment and repose. Again, *To Have and Have Not* (1937) comes from the Gospel of Matthew: "Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." To support a family in the Depression, the hero of the novel, the bootlegger Harry Morgan, loses first his arm, then the boat that he uses for smuggling and chartered fishing, and at last his life in a chance encounter with gangsters.

To Have and Have Not was Hemingway's closest approach to a "proletarian novel": the Communists got interested in him then and could never quite dismiss him. He wrote about the rich and powerful with a rebellious hatred that sprang from an anarchist germ he never cared to suppress. But the solidarity Hemingway spoke for was of the most general human sort. The old word "anti-Fascist" catches the character of his political affiliations more aptly than any positive designation could. The oblique references to the public works projects of the New Deal in *To Have and Have Not* are infused with the scorn of the little man against all governments and all institutions. Hemingway tended to judge political causes by his inference about the characters of fighters on the two sides. He traced politics to morality and morality to the morale of the person. It is a simple way of measuring such things, you might say—just one more drastic method of paring away and paring down. But how sharp his perceptions were, and what integrity they gave to his judgments, after all. As time goes by, he is not getting smaller. □

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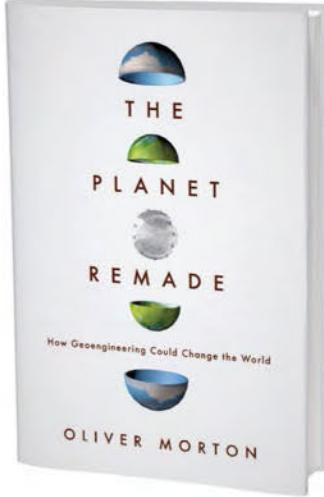
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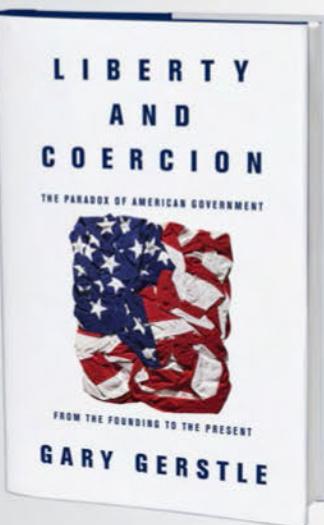
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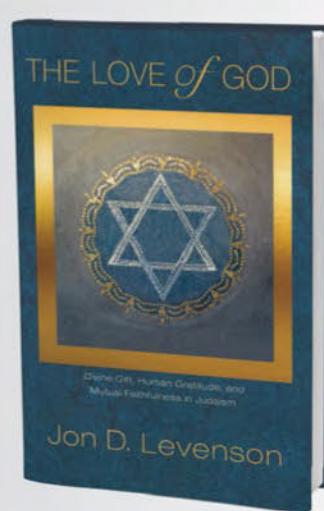
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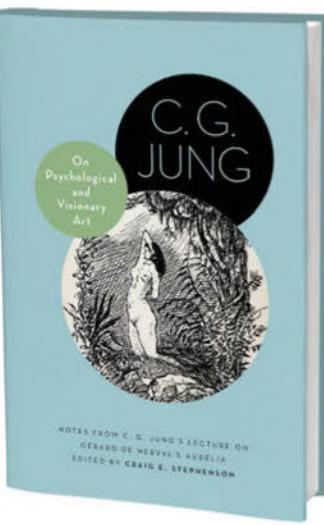
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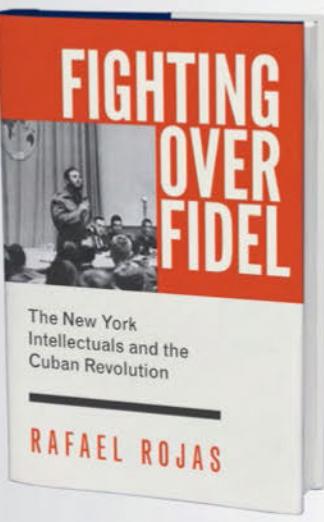
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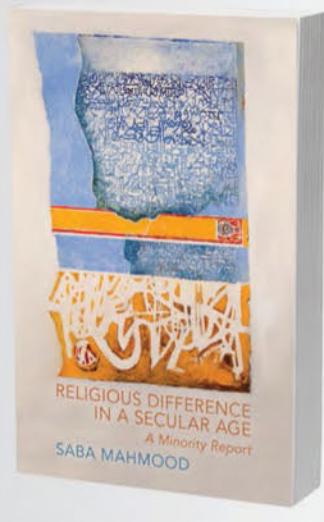
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The tenor of the national debate over immigration changed from the first minutes of Donald Trump's speech in New York City on June 16 announcing that he was running for the Republican presidential nomination. "The US has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems," the real estate magnate said. "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you," he said, gesturing to the crowd. "They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems to us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists."

Here he interjected a brief qualifier. "And some, I assume, are good people." But he returned quickly to his theme. "I speak to border guards and they tell us what we're getting. And it only makes common sense," Trump said. "They're not sending us the right people." His crowd cheered, delighted.

Mexican-American and other Latino organizations were outraged. Univisión, the national Spanish-language television network, dropped its telecast of Trump's Miss USA and Miss Universe beauty pageants. The Ricky Martin Foundation withdrew a golf tournament from a Trump property. The Spanish-born chef José Andrés abandoned plans for a restaurant in a new Trump hotel in Washington.

But the rhetoric, far from damaging Trump, lifted him in the polls. He intensified it. In August he issued a six-page immigration plan—called Immigration Reform That Will Make America Great Again—homing in once again on Mexico, saying that its leaders had been "taking advantage of the United States using illegal immigration to export the crime and poverty in their own country." "The Mexican government has taken the United States to the cleaners," the plan complained. Trump said he would make Mexico pay for a wall to run the length of the two-thousand-mile border, and if Mexican

leaders balked he would impound remittances to Mexico that were "derived from illegal wages." He also proposed to put an end to the constitutional right to birthright citizenship—a child's right to citizenship by having been born here—for US-born children of undocumented parents, which he said "remains the biggest magnet for illegal immigration."

As these proposals proved popular with his ardent and growing following, Trump made immigration a fixture of his stump speech. In September at a rally in Keene, New Hampshire, he softened his statements, saying,

Trump has given few details of how he would carry out his proposals. But his views on immigration became widely heard as his bombast captivated the media and he rode through the summer at the top of the Republican field in polls. His rivals had to adjust their positions to support or, at some risk, confront him. Governor Jeb Bush—who once described an illegal border crossing as an "act of love" by a parent seeking to help a family—retreated from his support for a path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants, instead advocating a more cautious "earned legal status."

have been wary of the country's rapidly evolving demographic diversity and want action against what they see as an uncontrolled influx of outlaws.

Trump left no doubt that he was not afraid to alienate Hispanics. He expelled Univisión anchorman Jorge Ramos, a Mexican-American who is one of the country's most prominent and popular Latinos, from a press conference (although a few minutes later he allowed Ramos to return). He even pulled out of an appearance at the US Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, which says it represents about 3.2 million Hispanic-owned businesses nationwide.

It took a figure of the stature of Pope Francis to break through to the American public with a different point of view. The pontiff wasted no time. "As a son of an immigrant family, I am happy to be a guest in this country, which was largely built by such families," he said, in the first comments of his visit, at the White House on September 23. In Philadelphia the pope addressed Hispanic immigrants directly, urging them not to forget that "you bring many gifts to your new nation." Francis exhorted them, "Do not be ashamed of what is part of you, your life blood.... By contributing your gifts, you will not only find your place here, you will help renew society from within."

The pope's visit also provided the opening for a Mexican-American whose brief star turn became a media sensation: five-year-old Sophie Cruz, in braids and a Oaxacan embroidered blouse. As Francis circled the Washington Ellipse in his pope-mobile, Sophie sprinted through the legs of his security guards until one of them finally lifted her up to receive a papal hug, allowing her to complete her mission: to give the pope a letter and a T-shirt asking him to support relief from deportation for undocumented immigrants—like her father.

It should not be surprising to see a new cycle of reaction against immigration in the United States. The rejection that Chinese, Irish, and Italian immigrants, among others, encountered in the past is familiar enough. Still, it seems remarkable in 2015 for an aspiring presidential candidate to base his campaign on a broad and visceral attack on one nationality, blurring lines between immigration, illegal and legal, and the large and varied society of citizens of Mexican origin. With his complaint that Mexico is "not sending us the right people," Trump has potentially picked a fight with as many as 34 million Mexican immigrants or Mexican-Americans, almost two thirds of the 54 million Latinos who now make up 17 percent of the population of the United States.

Trump has raised a question that could well determine the outcome of the presidential contest: How will Latinos respond? For many Mexican-Americans, Trump's campaign is nothing new. It fits within repeating cycles



"I love the Mexican people. I've had thousands and thousands of Mexican people that have worked with me over the years—thousands." But then he insisted that "we are going to have to do something" about children he called "anchor babies," by which, he made clear, he mainly meant Mexican infants. "They're on the other side of the border. They have a baby that walks across the border because nobody stops anybody."

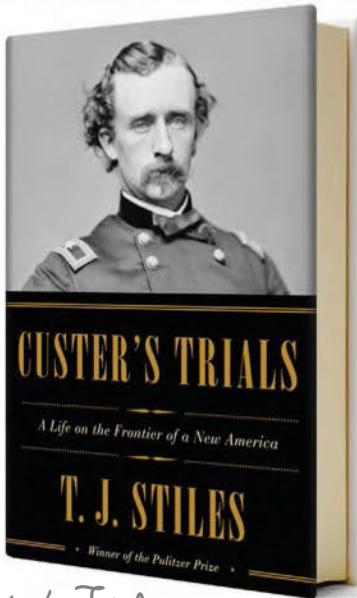
He elaborated on his proposal to deport all 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. "Some people don't agree, they think it's harsh," Trump told the crowd in Keene. "You know, Dwight Eisenhower was a wonderful general and a respected president, and he moved a million people out of the country," Trump said, a reference to Operation Wetback in 1954, when Mexican farm guest workers who had been summoned to harvest American crops during World War II were sent back to Mexico in mass round-ups commanded by a former army general.

"Nobody said anything about it," Trump said, lamenting that since then the historical moment had changed unfavorably for him. "When Trump does it, it's like 'ugh.' When Eisenhower does it, that was fine, whatever, he was allowed to do it."

Senator Marco Rubio backed off even further, after having been an author in 2013 of a comprehensive immigration bill that passed the Senate and included a long but direct pathway to citizenship. (That bill died in the House of Representatives.) Rubio said he had "learned" that "you can't even begin to have a conversation" about legalization without first achieving much more conspicuous border enforcement. What he said seemed to amount to an indefinite postponement of legalization efforts.

Until the Trump campaign, the Republican Party—even in the House of Representatives, with its many conservatives—had been edging toward a pragmatic recognition that mass deportation of 11 million people was not a realistic option, and that the self-deportation alternative Mitt Romney had proposed as a presidential candidate in 2012 was a half-baked political confection that was unconvincing to hardliners and offended many Latinos. It was a significant factor in Romney's defeat.

Then Trump came forward with his unapologetic nativism, which included a call for a "pause" in legal immigration to the United States. He thrust into the mainstream of Republican policymaking restrictionist ideas that had been marginal for decades, encouraging the anger of Americans who

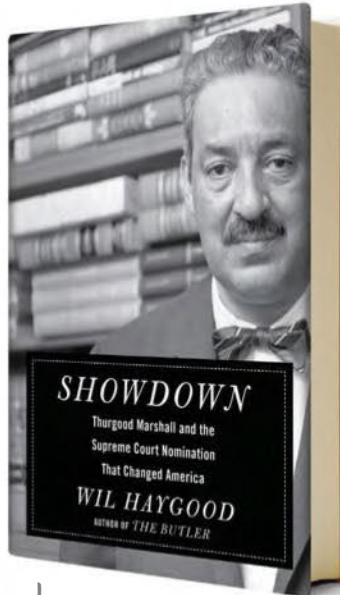


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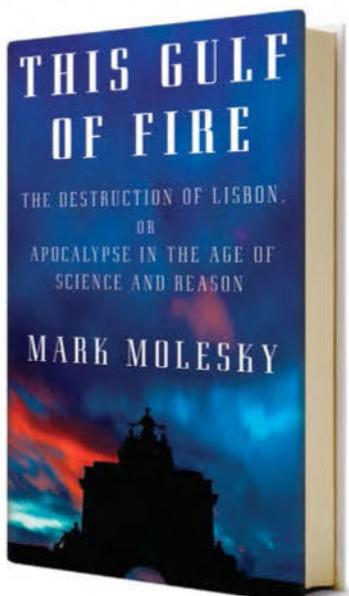


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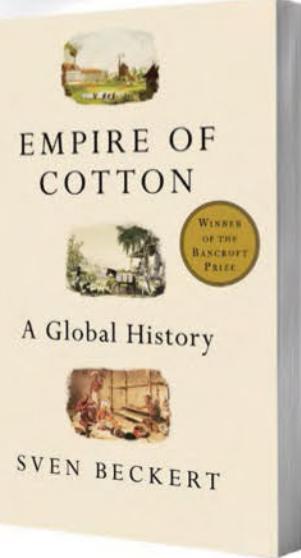
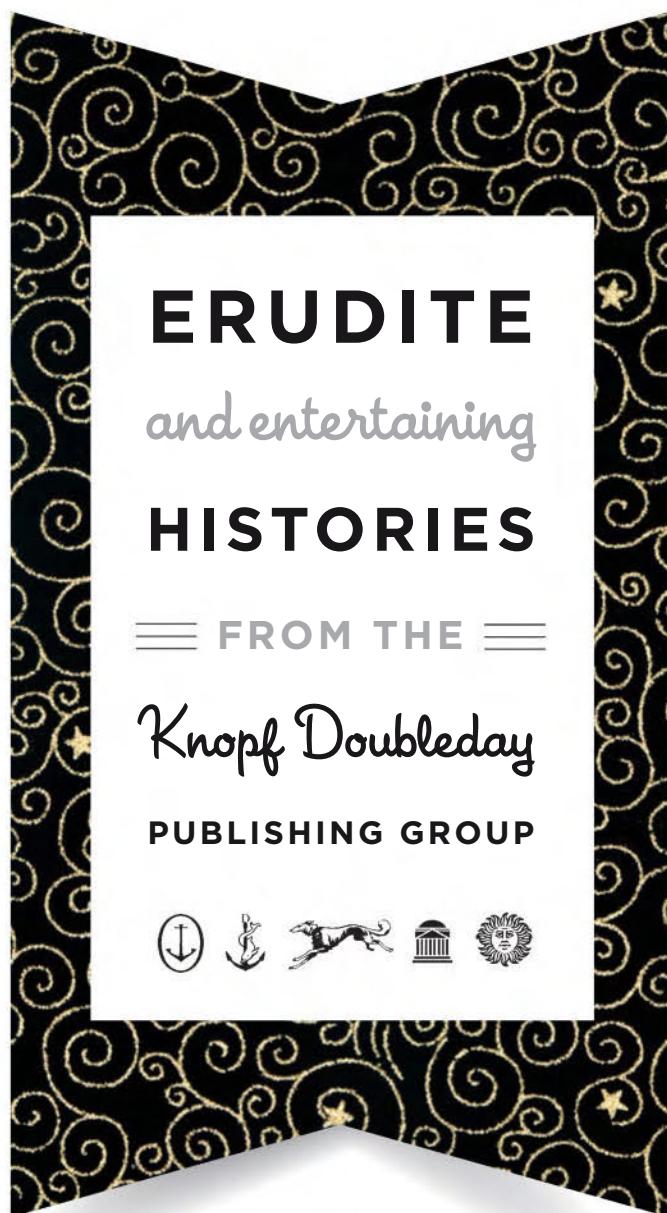
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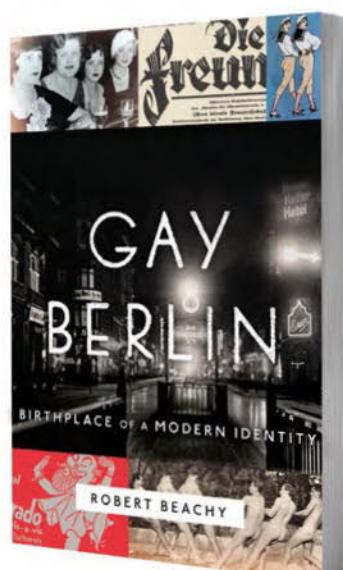
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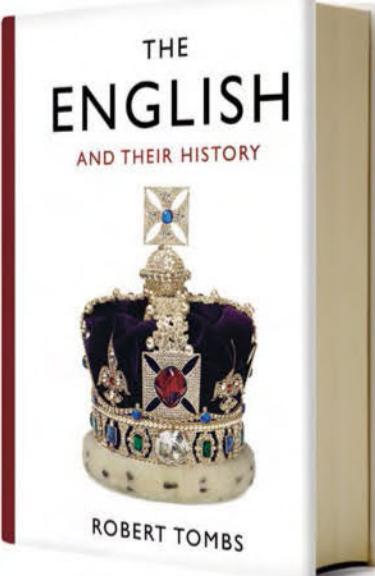
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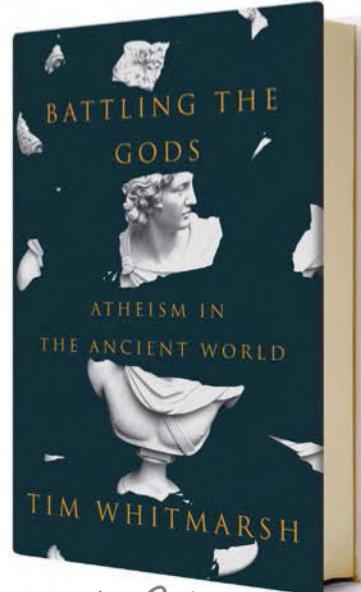
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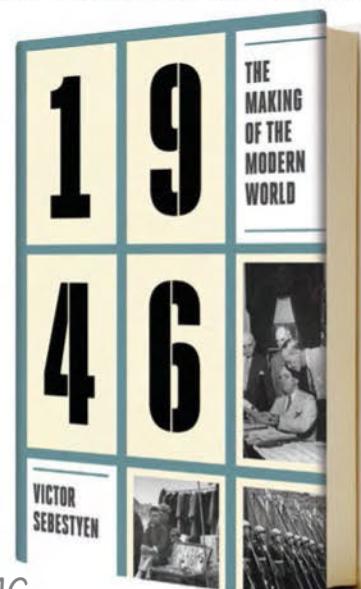
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of attraction and rejection for Mexican immigrants in this country and connects with a long history of challenges that citizens of Mexican descent have faced to their place in the society.

Mexicans are unique among the nationalities in the immigrant mix, since they are at once among the oldest and the newest of the country's foreign-born populations. Many Mexican-Americans can trace their heritage to ancestors who inhabited what is now the US Southwest during the years before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, when Mexico, defeated in war, ceded lands extending from Texas to California and as far north as Utah. They started out in this country not as immigrants but as subjects of conquest, even though under the terms of the treaty, the scattered population of less than 100,000 Mexicans in the immense new territory automatically became American citizens if they chose to remain.

Since the late decades of the nineteenth century, Mexican-American communities have been renewed and increased by waves of immigration. Mexican immigrants have been accepted, sometimes even welcomed, as laborers. Then during economic downturns they were vilified, and expelled when their labor was deemed unneeded. Until quite recently the border between Mexico and the United States was more or less porous: patrolling was haphazard until well into the twentieth century and the military-style enforcement that exists today has been built up only since the 1990s. After the most recent immigration surge, which started in the late 1980s and began to wane after 2008, about 11.5 million Mexicans are by far the largest immigrant group, according to the Pew Research Center; they make up one quarter of all foreign-born people in the United States.

Neil Foley, a historian at Southern Methodist University, has provided in *Mexicans in the Making of America* a usefully compact yet abundantly revealing history of those Mexicans and their continuous battles to secure their position here. He describes, for example, an immigration cycle a century ago and the backlash it generated, which took the form of a racial attack. In the 1920s an expanding American economy drew hundreds of thousands of Mexican migrant laborers, including many who crossed the border illegally. Foley chronicles a dispute the influx provoked in the congressional delegation from Texas. Representative John Nance Garner, who represented a district along the border, argued that Mexicans had integrated well in southern Texas and the region's agriculture depended on them. "They will do necessary labor that even a Negro won't touch," Garner said.

He was opposed by John Box, a congressman from northern Texas, who wanted the state to be preserved "as the future home of the white race." Box said that he would not allow Texas to become a "dumping ground for the human hordes of poverty stricken peon Indians of Mexico." The concerns of Box and other politicians of similar views became part of a brew of fears that led to the passage by Congress in 1924 of major legislation establishing national origin quotas for immigration and reinforcing older statutes limiting

US citizenship to "free white" persons and those of African origin.

In subsequent decades many Mexicans were accepted by the legal system as white. Nevertheless, Foley recounts, in everyday life Mexican people faced harsh segregation. Throughout the Southwest, "No Mexicans" signs hung on restaurants and stores. At the courthouse in Cochran County, Texas, a sign over the bathroom instructed: "For Whites, Mexicans Keep Out." Even Mexican diplomats felt the sting. Foley discovered in his archival research that a consul in Houston was informed by one restaurant owner that he would only be served in the kitchen. Another diplomat was told by a Catholic church that it would not baptize his child.



Rex Features

Sophie Cruz, an American citizen and the daughter of undocumented immigrants, approaching Pope Francis, Washington, D.C., September 2015

Discrimination persisted although as many as 500,000 people of Mexican descent served in World War II. They included up to 14,000 Mexican immigrants who were drafted although they were not American citizens; one of them, according to Foley, was General Eisenhower's personal cook. After the war ended, Mexican veterans who had not been naturalized during their service were required to show that they had originally entered the United States legally. Despite honorable discharges, thousands who could not show legal status were deported.

Veterans like Sergeant First Class Ysaias Morales, whose honors included three presidential citations, were refused service at restaurants. The wife of Felix Longoria, a Mexican-American private killed in the Philippines during the war, received his remains in 1948 and sought to bury them in a town near San Antonio. The funeral home manager turned her away, saying that "other white people object to the use of the funeral home by people of Mexican origin." But in a sign of changes soon to come, Longoria's case was taken up by the American GI Forum, an organization Mexican-Americans created after the war to deal with such discrimination. From there, the case attracted the attention of the junior senator from Texas, Lyndon Johnson. "I deeply regret to learn that the prejudice of some individuals extends even beyond this life," Johnson wrote in a telegram to the Forum. He arranged for Longoria to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Despite the backdrop of prejudice, the labor demands of the war and the postwar expansion brought a new round of efforts to draw workers from Mexico. The Bracero Program, which started in 1942 and continued until 1964, brought in more than 4.5 million laborers on temporary contracts, mainly to American farm fields. Wages were kept low and reports of abuse of the workers were frequent. A Mexican official whom Foley cites found several thousand braceros in Arkansas living with no plumbing or kitchen facilities in "a state of semi-slavery."

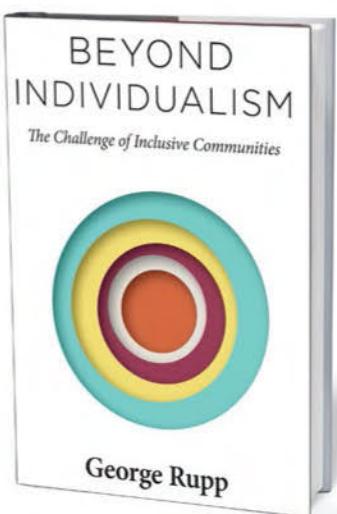
Yet demand for agricultural labor outstripped the supply of legal braceros after the war and illegal immigration surged again. Once again, Foley writes, it provoked a reaction. An influential radio broadcaster in Los Angeles, B. Tarkington Dowlen, demanded the removal of Mexican farm laborers from California, saying they were afflicted with syphilis and "inherently dishonest." Such rhetoric set the stage for the wholesale round-ups of Operation Wetback in 1954, led by General Joseph Swing, who had won Eisenhower's admiration as commander of the 11th Airborne Division during the war. In coordinated attacks, Swing sent military troops, state police, and Border Patrol agents through Mexican communities, carting people away in truckloads for summary deportation.

Along with his saga of intolerance, Foley also traces the efforts of Mexicans to resist and advance. The tenacious *lucha*, or struggle, of Cesar Chavez to organize farmworkers in California was an episode in which the interests of Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants diverged. The founder of the United Farm Workers was a Mexican-American from Arizona who had spent part of his childhood on the California migrant trail harvesting crops. He launched his campaign to unionize grape pickers in Delano in 1965. On the organization's banners, he used Mexican symbols, among them the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe surrounded by her luminescent cloak. But the Bracero Program had undercut wages for his farm workers, and newly arrived Mexicans were recruited by growers as scabs.

However, Chavez's campaigns were about more than fair wages for farm labor. In 1968 he undertook a fast that lasted twenty-five days and raised him to national attention. On the day when Chavez, wrapped in blankets, broke his fast, it was Robert Kennedy, then a Democratic presidential candidate, who handed him morsels of bread. "The world must know, from this time forward, that the migrant farm worker, the Mexican-American, is coming into his own rights," Kennedy said. The farmworkers were winning "a special kind of citizenship.... You are winning it for yourselves—and therefore no one can ever take it away."

Chavez became Mexican-Americans' most recognized figure. But more than any activism, a piece of legislation passed by Congress in 1965 had a lasting impact on empowering Mexican-Americans. The Immigration and Nationality Act transformed the immigration system and, over the next fifty years, gave Mexican-Americans an irreducible advantage: strength in numbers.

The law eliminated the national origin quotas, opening immigration



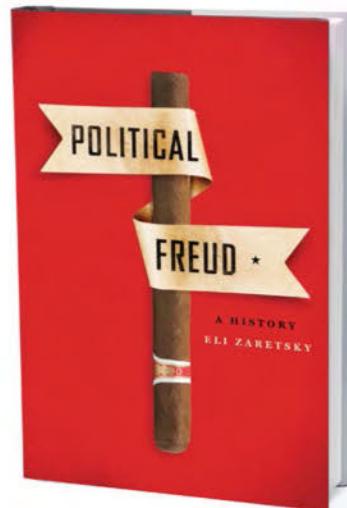
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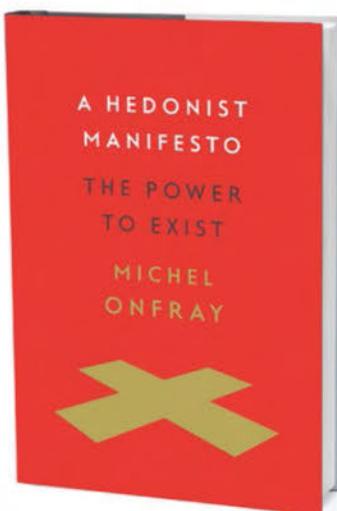
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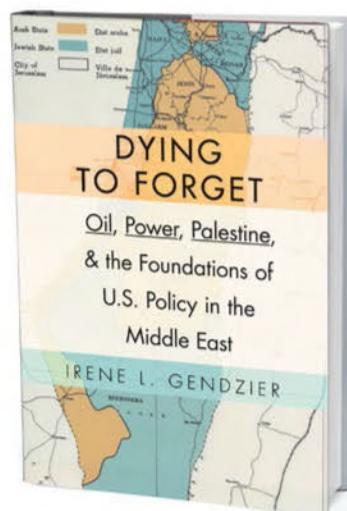
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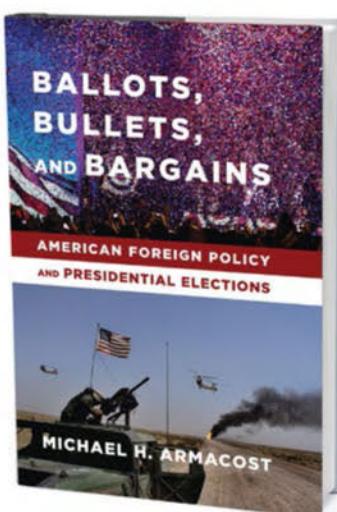
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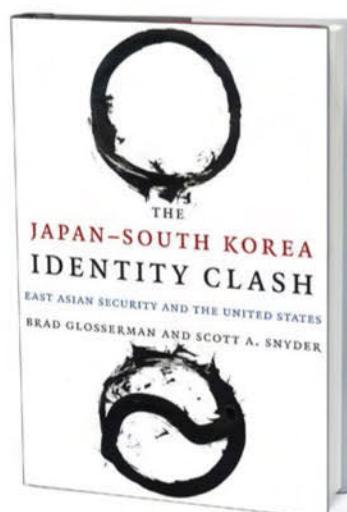
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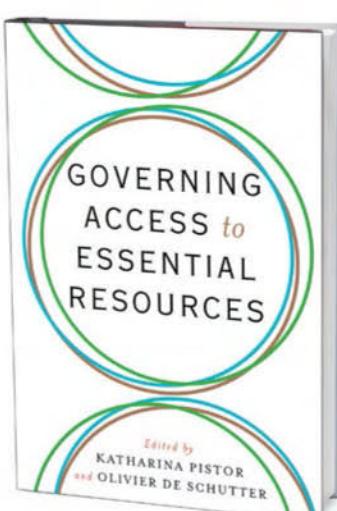
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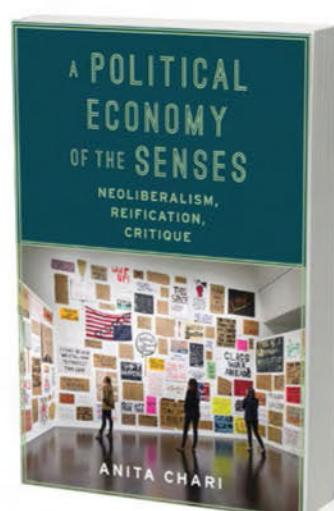


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to newcomers from around the world, and placed a priority on bringing family members of American citizens and legal residents who were already in the United States. This was especially favorable to Mexicans, with so many of their families settled here. Over the next five decades about 16 million Mexicans came, about 28 percent of all new immigrants, by far the most from any nation, according to the Pew Research Center.

Tom Gjelten, a longtime correspondent for National Public Radio, has written *A Nation of Nations*, about the 1965 law and its aftermath, in time for its fiftieth anniversary in October. With careful reporting and a storyteller's feel for narrative, he reconstructs the grand deal-making that yielded the law President Lyndon Johnson signed on New York's Liberty Island. He also goes deep into the lives of a half-dozen immigrant families in Fairfax County, Virginia, describing how they doggedly go about creating the better future they were seeking in the United States, even when the country makes nothing easy for them.

Although Gjelten's focus is not on Mexicans or illegal immigration, the book has rich insights for the current debate. In revisiting the 1965 negotiations, he discovered that none of the politicians and activists behind the law's passage had any notion of its future impact. In signing the law, President Johnson assured the public that it was "not a revolutionary bill.... It does not affect the lives of millions." Indeed, the new priorities on family reunification were largely the handiwork of an Ohio congressman, Michael Feighan, whose goal was to ensure that the immigration system continued to deliver mainly northern Europeans. As it turned out, half of all newcomers in the next five decades were from Latin America; today, according to the Pew Research Center, Europeans are only 10 percent of new arrivals. The demographic shifts that made Mexicans and other Latinos the fastest-growing minority—the result of the emphasis on uniting families—were a legislative accident.

Gjelten also shows the gritty drudgery of immigrants' working lives and the high personal costs they pay to join American society. A Latina from El Salvador, Marta Quintanilla Call, left two small sons behind and on her way to an illegal border crossing suffered a series of sexual assaults by a macho smuggler. She labored as a motel house-keeper and a cashier, always scrimping and fending off predatory local Salvadoran street gangs. "It doesn't offer money," she said of the United States after two decades here. "That's a lie. You have to work hard to live here."

But Quintanilla Call eventually purchased a house for her parents in El Salvador, made a stable marriage to an American citizen, and brought her sons legally to the United States. "If you want to see the fruit, first you have to sow the seed," she would say. As soon as she could pass the naturalization test, she became a citizen herself, determined to vote. Now she also has a stake in the tone and substance of the immigration debate.

After 1965, the immigration laws were subject to new cycles. A revision in 1976 drastically reduced legal channels for Mexican workers to immigrate, leading to another illegal surge. The amnesty of 1986 gave residency to about three million immigrants, mostly

Mexicans. But it did not create new legal channels, and illegal immigration grew again.

Nevertheless, several scholars who write about Latino immigrants today are optimistic about their progress and their prospects. In a pivotal change, they find, over the last decade Mexican-Americans and other Latinos have begun to unite in an emerging national identity that is binding them together as a national political force.

Mario T. García, a historian at the University of California at Santa Barbara, calls them the Latino Generation, after getting to know some of them in his classes. With a paternal pride, he assembles simple oral histories of thir-

the failed Proposition 187 in the 1990s in California, an effort to restrict public benefits for undocumented immigrants. "Even those born in the United States have had to define themselves in part in reaction to neo-nativism," García writes.

An even more upbeat prognosis comes from Matt Barreto and Gary M. Segura, scholars who are also founders of Latino Decisions, a polling research organization. The surveys they present in *Latino America* have convinced them that this Latino generation is ready to become a decisive force in American politics.



Michelle Frankfurter

The US Border Patrol apprehending migrants, Rio Grande Valley Sector near McAllen, Texas, April 2013; photograph by Michelle Frankfurter from her book Destino, published recently by FotoEvidence

teen members of the cohort, mostly young people in their twenties. In a minimal but instructive analysis, García describes them as progeny of the 1965 immigration law, whose parents joined the flow from Latin America and the Caribbean. Sturdy families led by strong-willed parents are a common factor in their success at rising above poverty. "I don't want my dad to have three jobs the rest of his life," a Mexican-American woman, Cindy Romero, says, explaining what drives her.

Many of the parents came illegally. But crucially for the children's advancement, most of them eventually acquired legal status. The young people are going to college in significant numbers, García writes, "a totally new historical experience" for Latinos in the United States. They speak English, often as a first language. They are "in fact acculturating and working to become very much a part of this country that unfortunately still does not embrace them as full Americans," he insists.

At the same time, they are "more and more identifying themselves as Latinos in the public sphere." Coming of age just as they became the largest minority, they "realize the enormity of their numbers." And most have considerable experience with political hostility, having grown up amid angry disputes like

They cite "a mountain of evidence" that common views and experiences among different groups—Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, even Cuban-Americans—are creating a common identity and an "increasingly unified and empowered population." They note that 93 percent of Latinos who are under eighteen today are American citizens. By their count, every month more than 73,000 Latinos become old enough to vote. "The demography," they write, "is relentless."

Their research addresses the risks for Republicans in Donald Trump's campaign. While jobs and education are more pressing concerns for many Latinos, the immigration debate is "a critical dynamic" motivating their votes, Barreto and Segura say. At the same time, "perceived attacks on the community" have an effect of unifying all Latino groups. "For the GOP to fend off the electoral consequences of demographic change," they write, "the party must persuade those Latino voters who are open to supporting Republican candidates that the age of hostility is over."

That is the opposite of Trump's approach. His characterization of Mexican immigrants as criminals and sex offenders is insulting but also inaccurate, going against a consensus of aca-

demic research showing that Mexicans have far lower incarceration rates than Americans. But more alarming to many Latinos are Trump's threats to deport millions of Mexican immigrants and require them to take their American-born children with them, ignoring that it is illegal to deport an American citizen. Although a mass purge may sound outlandish, for Latino immigrants the possibility is not remote. While the pace of deportations has slowed in recent months, they continue to be a fact of life in Latino communities. During the last seven years the Obama administration has deported more than two million immigrants.

Probably most offensive of Trump's tactics so far is his having made the repeal of birthright citizenship a central issue of his campaign. Immigrants know the term "anchor baby" is a misnomer, since US-born children cannot help their parents immigrate until the children turn twenty-one years old. It seems unlikely that Trump could mobilize the huge national push it would take to amend the Constitution. Rather, the effect of his proposal is to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the citizenship of many Latino children.

Not surprisingly, 72 percent of Latinos have a negative view of Donald Trump, according to a recent poll by NBC News, *The Wall Street Journal*, and Telemundo. But with the Republican campaign in flux, it is still early to predict what lasting effect he will have on Latino voting. Dr. Ben Carson, the neurosurgeon who has pulled ahead of Trump in some polls, has said he does not favor swift deportation for undocumented immigrants. Instead, "after we seal the border," he said in the Republican debate on September 16, he would offer them a chance to become guest workers, primarily in agriculture, with no prospect of citizenship. Those who declined would "become illegal, and as illegals they will be treated as such." Senator Rubio, a Cuban-American, is also rising, and he could attract Latino votes.

Some Latinos could be discouraged from participating in the election. But a glimpse of a more likely outcome was provided by the sprint across the Washington Ellipse by Sophie Cruz, who happens to be the US-born child of undocumented parents—in Trump's terms, an anchor baby. Leaders of the Hermandad Mexicana Transnacional, the organization that brought Sophie and her father Raúl to Washington, said in interviews that they had been planning an effort to make contact with Pope Francis for months. Sophie, the organization said, had composed her message herself ahead of time, committing it to memory. She wanted immigration reform so that her father would not have to worry about deportation and, she believed, would have more time to spend with her. "I have the right to live with my parents," she said.

In recent years organizations like the Hermandad have grown and connected as never before into national advocacy networks. This year, many of those groups have turned their energies to voter registration, drawing on the anger Trump has provoked. Tens of thousands of legal immigrants have become naturalized in recent months. Thanks to Trump, Latinos may finally in 2016 achieve the electoral power that is the promise of their history and immigrant destiny. □

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A Fear of Foreign Law

Jed S. Rakoff

**The Court and the World:
American Law and
the New Global Realities**
by Stephen Breyer.
Knopf, 382 pp., \$27.95

Perhaps no other member of the US Supreme Court has such an affinity for matters foreign as Justice Stephen Breyer. Married to a British clinical psychologist, and himself a member of France's exclusive Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques, Justice Breyer has thought long and hard about the relationship between US and foreign law, and the result is his latest book, *The Court and the World*.

One suspects that the impetus for the book may have been the recent debates, within the Court and elsewhere, over whether foreign law (and foreign viewpoints) should have any influence on Supreme Court decisions concerned with domestic matters. In 2002, Justice John Paul Stevens, writing for the Court in *Atkins v. Virginia*, held that the execution of mentally retarded criminals was unconstitutional because of the growing "national consensus" that it constituted cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth Amendment. In a footnote, however, Justice Stevens mentioned in passing that

within the world community, the imposition of the death penalty for crimes committed by mentally retarded offenders is overwhelmingly disapproved.

This provoked the ire of Chief Justice William Rehnquist, who, in dissent, sought "to call attention to the defects in the Court's decision to place weight on foreign laws," because "if it is evidence of a *national* consensus for which we are looking, then the viewpoints of other countries simply are not relevant." In a separate dissent, Justice Antonin Scalia, in his inimitable style, stated that

the Prize for the Court's Most Feeble Effort to fabricate 'national consensus' must go to the appeal (deservedly relegated to a footnote) to the views of...members of the so-called "world community,"...whose notions of justice are (thankfully) not always those of our people.

This might have seemed a tempest in a teapot. But three years later, Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the Court in *Roper v. Simmons*—which similarly held that execution of persons under the age of eighteen is unconstitutional because of a national consensus that it constitutes cruel and unusual punishment—effectively upped the ante by asserting that foreign viewpoints were indeed relevant. Justice Kennedy stated:

Our determination that the death penalty is disproportionate punishment for offenders under 18 finds confirmation in the stark reality that the United States is the only country in the world that continues to give official sanction to the ju-

Stephen Breyer



venile death penalty.... [At least since 1958], the Court has referred to the laws of other countries and to international authorities as instructive for its interpretation of the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of "cruel and unusual punishments."

Dissenting, Justice Scalia responded that "the basic premise of the Court's argument—that American law should conform to the laws of the rest of the world—ought to be rejected out of hand." He went on to point out the innumerable ways in which the US legal system differs from those of most other nations, including England. This in turn prompted Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, while otherwise dissenting from the majority's holding, to add:

Nevertheless, I disagree with Justice Scalia's contention...that foreign and international law have no place in our Eighth Amendment jurisprudence. Over the course of nearly half a century, the Court has consistently referred to foreign and international law as relevant to its assessment of evolving standards of decency.

This debate—which had also surfaced in the Supreme Court's 2003 decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* holding laws against consensual sodomy unconstitutional—continues to this day. In Justice Breyer's account, the views of Justice Scalia and his supporters provoke the one and only paragraph, in

an otherwise remarkably balanced and dispassionate book, that borders on the preevish. Referring to those views, Justice Breyer writes:

It is, of course, possible that some version of the psychological phenomenon of displacement is at work. If you are upset about A, you may blame B. The critics, upset about the Court's death penalty and sodomy conclusions, are quick at least in part to blame foreign law, here an innocent victim.

This may well be true; indeed, one hardly needs psychology to recognize that the particular appeals to logic and principle advanced in any debate are frequently chosen because they lead to a preferred outcome in the specific controversy at issue. Call it displacement, or even call it hypocrisy, the tendency is as endemic to judging as to any other human endeavor. But it is also irrelevant. If the argument is a good one, if it has the power to convince and persuade, the motive for advancing it is neither here nor there. The legal process as a whole, and judging in particular, are dependent on good reasoning, and if the reasoning is sound, the law cannot disregard it because it leads to an unwanted result in a particular case.

Justice Breyer recognizes this, and so he responds to the merits of Justice Scalia's arguments in several ways, two of which may be singled out here. First, he notes, as did Justice O'Connor, that when it comes to determining something as broad and constantly evolving as what constitutes "cruel and unusual

punishments," consideration of the experiences and views of other nations, while they should never be dispositive of the decision of a US court, can provide a useful check on the reasoning of US judges. Few other clauses in the Constitution are so closely tied to evolving standards of morality as "cruel and unusual punishments," and the many nations that share our basic moral values have often had to confront the same dilemmas that we face when determining which punishments are cruel.

Their views cannot dictate ours, for, as Justice Scalia and others rightly point out, that would be both undemocratic and beyond the power that our Constitution gives to federal judges. But it does not follow that we should purposely blind ourselves to the reasons and results that others facing similar problems have reached. What the Declaration of Independence calls "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind" counsels us to consider such opinions "for what they are worth." In the process, they may well inform our own reasoning.

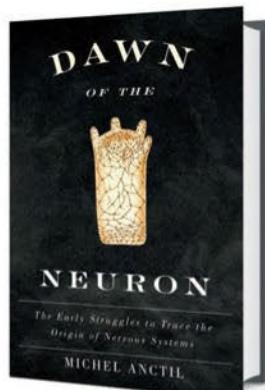
Second, and this is Justice Breyer's most fundamental point, we judges cannot really escape considering foreign laws, foreign rulings, and foreign proceedings in a wide range of circumstances, for the international interconnectedness of modern life makes it impossible to ignore such matters. As he writes, "It is not the cosmopolitanism of some jurists that seeks this kind of engagement but the nature of the world itself that demands it."

The rest of Justice Breyer's book is designed to illustrate this sentence. In his first four chapters, he considers how the changing nature of war itself—and most notably the advent of a never-ending war against terrorism—has led even a conservative Supreme Court, however reluctantly, to become at least tangentially involved in placing limits on the executive's conduct of war in ways that would have been unthinkable in a more conventional war. For example, the "it's-not-my-department" approach that underlay the Court's (shameful) approval of the domestic internment of American citizens of Japanese descent during World War II was replaced, in the 2008 decision of *Boumediene v. Bush*, with the extension of the writ of habeas corpus to even the non-US citizens detained in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

As several justices pointed out in that case, the War on Terror is a different kind of war, "the real risks, the real threats of [which] are constant and not likely soon to abate." It does not follow that minimal judicial oversight of measures to combat terrorism must be suspended indefinitely. Rather, such questionable restrictions as might in the past have been excused or ignored by the Court as temporary wartime measures can no longer be exempted from judicial scrutiny.¹

Placing the *Boumediene* case in a still broader setting, Justice Breyer argues

¹Regretfully, the Obama administration, which declared at the outset its

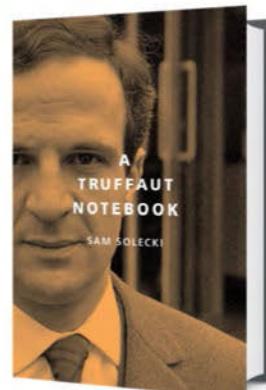


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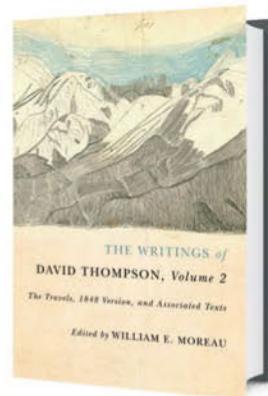


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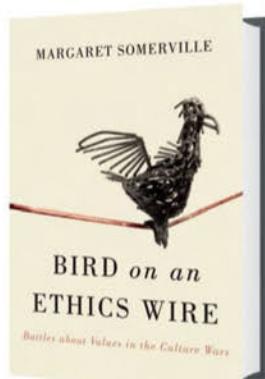
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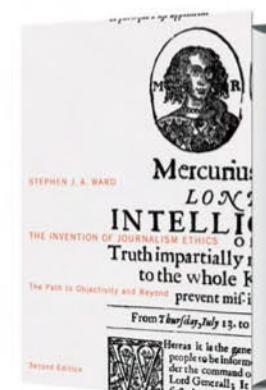
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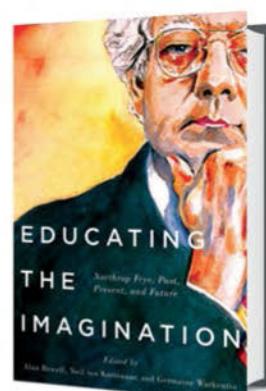
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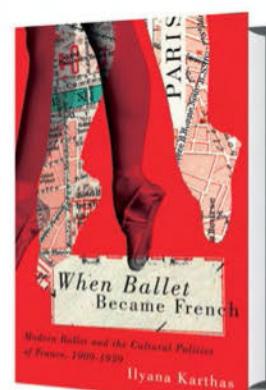
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that the changes in the nature of modern war “are merely one particularly worrisome manifestation of the larger reality...of the ways, both good and bad, in which foreign actors and activity enter into our national life and create problems that we share with other nations.” Thus, in successive chapters, he considers the foreign reach of US statutory law, the increasingly complicated interpretation of international agreements (which have hugely proliferated since World War II), and even the role of US judges in advancing the rule of law abroad. The common theme is to illustrate his contention that US judges cannot avoid ever greater engagement with foreign and international law.

This thesis is not without its critics, both on the Supreme Court and elsewhere. Indeed, it is partly to avoid such engagement with international law that the conservative majority of the Supreme Court has in the past few years breathed new life into the so-called “presumption against extraterritoriality.” Under this doctrine (originally enunciated in 1909 by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.), a federal statute is presumed not to extend to foreign conduct, even if the conduct in some respects has an impact on activities in the United States, unless Congress has clearly manifested its intention to deal with such conduct.

For example, in the 2010 case of *Morrison v. National Australia Bank Ltd.*, the Court held that, because of the presumption against extraterritoriality, the federal securities fraud laws do not extend to schemes that are chiefly devised abroad but that nonetheless defraud US shareholders, unless the shares are sold in the US. A main reason for this result, the Court stated, was to avoid “the probability of incompatibility with the applicable laws of other countries”—in other words, to avoid grappling with the very issues that Breyer suggests cannot be avoided.

A particularly revealing extension of the presumption against extraterritoriality may be found in the Court’s 2013 decision in *Kiobel v. Royal Dutch Petroleum Co.*, in which Nigerian citizens who had received political asylum in the United States sued two foreign-based oil companies that had allegedly provided financial and other assistance to Nigerian forces that unlawfully occupied the plaintiffs’ land and used that land as a staging ground for murders, rapes, and other atrocities committed against Nigerians protesting environmentally unsound oil exploration activities. The case was brought in federal court in New York under a unique US statute called the Alien Tort Statute, enacted by the very first Congress in 1789. That statute reads in its entirety as follows:

The [federal] district courts shall have original jurisdiction of any

intention to dismantle the Guantánamo detention camp, does not seem to have taken the lessons of *Boumediene* to heart. Seven years later, over one hundred people remain in detention there, at least half of whom have neither been charged with any crime nor cleared for release. Yet the Department of Justice has opposed every habeas petition filed on their behalf, arguing, among other things, that their detention is only temporary.

civil action by an alien for a tort only, committed in violation of the law of nations or a treaty of the United States.

Judge Henry Friendly, generally regarded as the greatest federal judge of the mid-to-late twentieth century, once referred to the Alien Tort Statute as a “legal Lohengrin,” because “no one seems to know whence it came.” In the first two hundred years after its enactment, the statute was used in only three cases. But in 1980 a federal court of appeals found it applicable to a suit brought by a Paraguayan woman living in New York against a Paraguayan policeman visiting New York who, the woman alleged, had tortured her father to death in Paraguay. Subsequently, dozens of cases were brought under the Alien Tort Statute, increasingly against foreign corporations alleged to have been complicit in tortious violations—i.e., violations involving a tort, or act of civil wrongdoing—of international law committed abroad that injured noncitizen plaintiffs now resident in the US.

In *Kiobel*, however, the Court, invoking the presumption against extraterritoriality, concluded that the Alien Tort Statute applies only when the acts constituting the alleged tortious violation of international law “touch and concern the territory of the United States... with sufficient force to displace the presumption against extraterritorial application.” In other words, if, as in the *Kiobel* case, all or most of the relevant misconduct occurred outside the United States, the statute cannot be invoked. In so holding, the Court again reiterated that the purpose of the presumption against extraterritoriality was “to protect against unintended clashes between our laws and those of other nations which could result in international discord.”

Justice Breyer, in a concurring opinion joined by Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Elena Kagan, and Sonia Sotomayor, expressly disagreed with this reasoning. Although the legislative history of the Alien Tort Statute was murky, prior Supreme Court decisions had affirmed that it was intended to apply, among other things, to instances of piracy occurring on the high seas against ships bearing foreign flags. Therefore, since Court had already determined that Congress intended the statute to apply to activity outside the US, the presumption against extraterritoriality was inapplicable.

As for the potential for clashes with the laws of other nations, Justice Breyer stated his belief that this potential had been largely eliminated by prior decisions of the Court restricting the definition of torts committed in violation of international law to atrocities that all civilized nations recognized as beyond the pale. The perpetrator of such outrages was “an enemy of all mankind,” and the statute should not be interpreted to provide him refuge from civil liability to his victims. In the *Kiobel* case, however, the oil companies involved had only a tangential connection to the alleged misconduct, and so Justice Breyer and the other concurring justices who joined his opinion still agreed with the majority’s conclusion to dismiss the suit.

The majority decision in *Kiobel* was promptly denounced by *The New York Times* as a “giant setback for human rights,” and various human rights organizations issued similar statements. But in the abstract, there is something to be said for both sides of the debate.

For example, in the September 2015 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, US Circuit Judge José A. Cabranes, who wrote the initial appellate decision dismissing the *Kiobel* case (though on other grounds than those used by the Supreme Court), argues that the extension of US law to suits by non-US citizens for torts, however outrageous, that were committed entirely abroad has already fostered resentment on the part of many foreign governments that we respect. He quotes Thabo Mbeki, the post-apartheid president of South Africa, denouncing as “judicial imperialism” a US appellate court’s approval of a 2007 lawsuit



Supreme Court Justices Stephen Breyer and Antonin Scalia at a subcommittee hearing of the House Judiciary Committee, Capitol Hill, May 2010

international character accepted by the civilized world.” The same case also required that such torts be defined with specificity, so as to preclude vague claims of generalized misconduct.

I could suggest another perspective on the extension of the presumption against extraterritoriality to both the securities fraud statute and the Alien Tort Statute. In applying the presumption against extraterritoriality to the securities fraud statute in the *Morrison* case, the conservative majority of the Supreme Court suggested that many of the federal securities fraud cases involving foreign misconduct that only tangentially involved the United States were the product of the unique advantages that US law accords to securities lawyers bringing class action suits against corporations on a contingent-fee basis.³

Breyer refers to this obliquely when, in his description of the *Morrison* case, he quotes the statement in the majority opinion that “some fear that [the United States] has become the Shangri-La of class-action litigation for lawyers representing those allegedly cheated in foreign securities markets.” Without overtly drawing the analogy, Justice Breyer then goes on to point out, in his discussion of cases brought under the Alien Tort Statute, that there has been a substantial increase in the number of such cases filed against corporations, with “about 150 [such] suits filed since 1993.” He adds that, more generally, those bringing such suits have begun to see suing corporations as “particularly fruitful,” since the corporations “have deep pockets, they or their representatives can be found in the United States, and they might well settle a suit....”

To this writer, it seems more than likely that a desire to curb suits brought by contingent-fee lawyers against corporations was a motivating factor behind the extension of the presumption against extraterritoriality to the Alien Tort Statute in *Kiobel*. But, as noted earlier, the fact that a decision is motivated by an economic or political agenda does not of itself invalidate the reasons advanced in support of the decision. Within broad limits, such reasoning must stand or fall on its own terms. And the real battle, as the debate between Justice Breyer and Justice Scalia illustrates, is between those who would narrow the role of US courts in both considering and implementing foreign and international law and those who would expand it.

I am not as certain as Justice Breyer that the increase in international interdependence makes more judicial involvement with international law inevitable. As the enlarged application of the presumption against extraterritoriality illustrates, there is still room to retreat into judicial isolationism. But I do agree with Justice Breyer that this would be a tragic mistake. In this interconnected world, to forgo the opportunity to help guide the development of interactive law among nations, and to be guided by it, would be to miss a valuable opportunity to advance the rule of law. □

³For a more detailed description of the merits and demerits of this phenomenon, see my article “The Cure for Corporate Wrongdoing: Class Actions vs. Individual Prosecutions,” *The New York Review*, November 19, 2015.

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A Striptease Among Pals

Daniel Mendelsohn

A Little Life

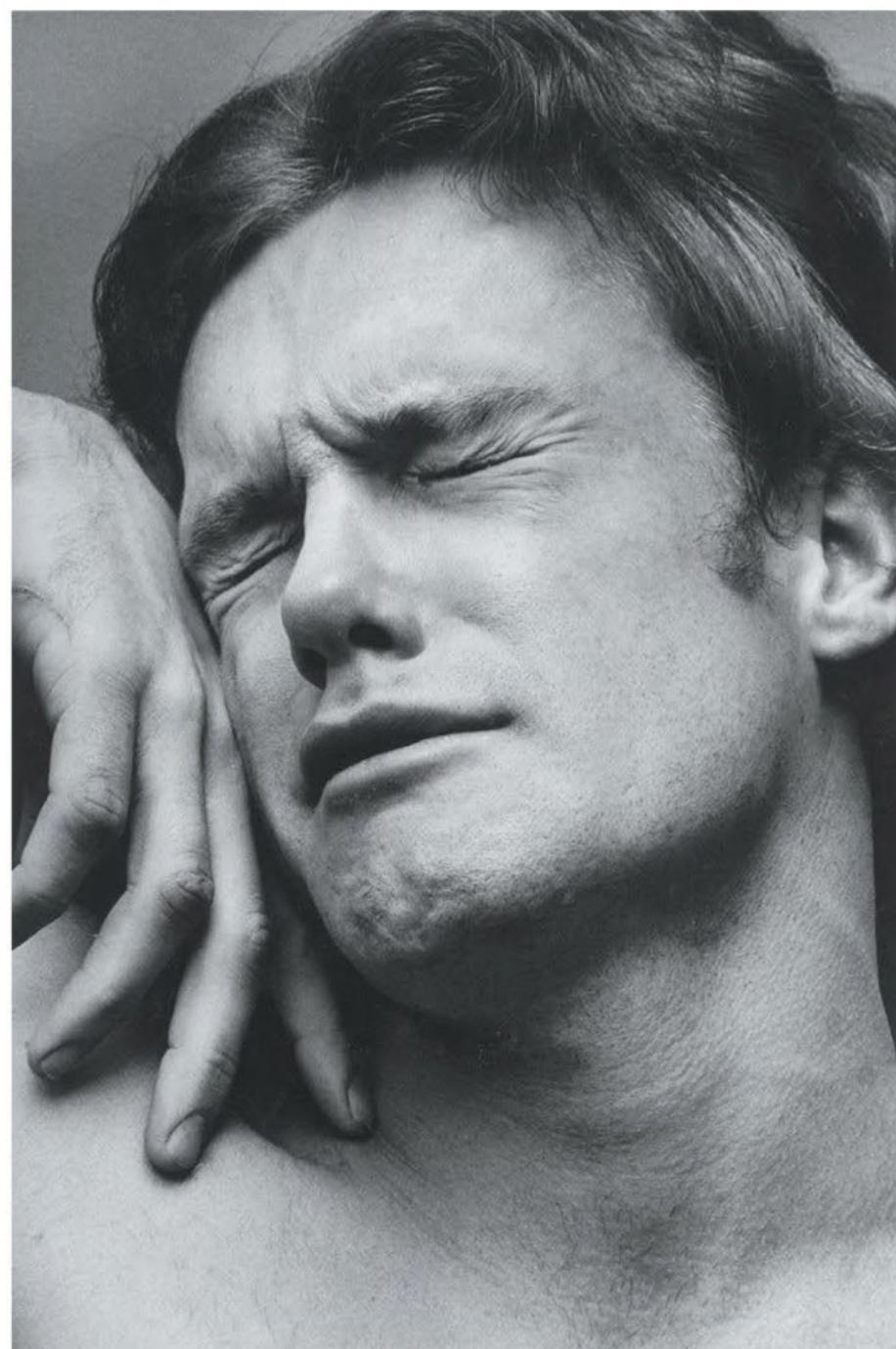
by Hanya Yanagihara.
Doubleday, 720 pp., \$30.00

1.

The title of Hanya Yanagihara's second work of fiction stands in almost comical contrast to its length: at 720 pages, it's one of the biggest novels to be published this year. To this literal girth there has been added, since the book appeared in March, the metaphorical weight of several prestigious award nominations—among them the Kirkus Prize, which Yanagihara won, the Booker, which she didn't, and the National Book Award, which will be conferred in mid-November. Both the size of *A Little Life* and the impact it has had on readers and critics alike—a best seller, the book has received adulatory reviews in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and other serious venues—reflect, in turn, the largeness of the novel's themes. These, as one of its four main characters, a group of talented and artistic friends whom Yanagihara traces from college days to their early middle age in and around New York City, puts it, are “sex and food and sleep and friends and money and fame.”

The character who articulates these themes, a black artist on the cusp of success, has one great artistic ambition, which is to “chronicle in pictures the drip of all their lives.” This is Yanagihara's ambition, too. “Drip,” indeed, suggests why the author thinks her big book deserves its “little” title: eschewing the kind of frenetic plotting that has proved popular recently (as witness, say, Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*, the 2014 Pulitzer winner), *A Little Life* presents itself, at least at the beginning, as a modest chronicle of the way that life happens to a small group of people with a bit of history in common—as a catalog of the incremental accumulations that, almost without our noticing it, become the stuff of our lives: the jobs and apartments, the one-night stands and friendships and grudges, the furniture and clothes, lovers and spouses and houses.

In this respect, the book bears a superficial resemblance to a certain kind of “woman's novel” of an earlier age—Mary McCarthy's 1963 best seller *The Group*, say, which similarly traces the trajectories of a group of college friends over a span of time. But the objects of this woman novelist's scrutiny are men. Bound by friendships first formed at an unnamed northeastern liberal arts college, Yanagihara's cast is as carefully diversified as the crew in one of those 1940s wartime bomber movies, however twenty-first-century their anxieties may be. There is the black artist, JB, a gay man of Haitian descent who's been raised by a single mother; Malcolm, a biracial architect who rather comically “comes out” as a straight man and frets guiltily over his parents' wealth; Willem, a handsome and amiable midwestern actor who stumbles into stardom; and Jude, a brilliant, tormented litigator (he's also a talented amateur vocalist and *patissier*) with no identifiable ethnicity and a dark secret that shad-



© 1987 The Peter Hujar Archive LLC/Pace-MacGill Gallery, New York/Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

Peter Hujar: Orgasmic Man, 1969; from Peter Hujar: Love & Lust, published last year by Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco. A new exhibition, 'Peter Hujar: 21 Pictures,' will be on view at the gallery, January 7–March 5, 2016.

ows his and his friends' lives.

As contrived as this setup can feel, it has the makings of an interesting novel about a subject that is too rarely explored in contemporary letters: nonsexual friendship among adult men. In an interview she gave to *Kirkus Reviews*, Yanagihara described her fascination with male friendship—particularly since, she asserted to the interviewer, men are given “such a small emotional palette to work with.” Although she and her female friends often speak about their emotions together, she told the interviewer, men seemed to be different:

I think they have a very hard time still naming what it is to be scared or vulnerable or afraid, and it's not just that they can't talk about it—it's that they can't sometimes even identify what they're feeling.... When I hear sometimes my male friends talking about these manifestations of what, to me, is clearly fear, or clearly shame, they really can't even express the word itself.¹

¹“Hanya Yanagihara, Author of *A Little Life*, interviewed by Claiborne Smith,” March 16, 2015.

ingly long life spans inevitably invites exploitation and ruin; like the island children whom the doctor later adopts and abuses, the island and its tribal culture are “raped” by white men.)

Yanagihara's new book would seem, at first glance, to have satisfied her wish for a “tribe” she could devote an entire novel to. Its focus is on a tiny group circumscribed to the point of being hermetic: *A Little Life* never strays from its four principals, and, as other critics have noted, the novel provides so little historical, cultural, or political detail that it's often difficult to say precisely when the characters' intense emotional dramas take place.

Yet *A Little Life*, like its predecessor, gets hopelessly sidetracked by a secondary narrative—one in which, strikingly, homosexual pedophilia is once again the salient element. For Jude, we learn, was serially abused as a child and young adult by the priests and counselors who raised him. This is the dark secret that explains his tormented present: self-cutting and masochistic relationships and, eventually, suicide. (The latter plot point isn't anything the intelligent reader won't have guessed after fifty pages.) Yanagihara's real subject, it turns out, is abjection. What begins as a novel that looks like it's going to be a bit retro—a cross between Mary McCarthy and a Stendhalian tale of young talent triumphing in a great metropolis—soon reveals itself as a very twenty-first-century tale indeed: abuse, victimization, self-loathing.

This sleight-of-hand is slyly hinted at in the book's striking cover image, a photograph by the late Peter Hujar of a man grimacing in what appears to be agony. The joke, of which Yanagihara and her publishers were aware, is that the portrait belongs to a series of images that Hujar, who was gay, made of men in the throes of orgasm. In the case of Yanagihara's novel, however, the “real” feeling—not only what the book is about but, I suspect, what its admirers crave—is pain rather than pleasure.

2.

This is a shame, because Yanagihara is good at providing the pleasures that go with a certain kind of fictional “anthropology.” The accounts of her characters' early days in New York and their gradual rises to success and celebrity are tangy with vivid aperçus: “There were times when the pressure to achieve happiness felt almost oppressive.” “New York was populated by the ambitious. It was often the only thing that everyone here had in common.”

By far the most fully achieved of the four characters is the actor, Willem, whose rise from actor-waiter to Hollywood stardom, punctuated by flashbacks to his rural childhood (a touchingly described relationship with a crippled brother suggests why he's so good at both the empathy and self-effacement necessary to his work), is the most persuasive narrative trajectory in the book. A passage about two thirds into the novel in which he realizes he's “famous”

demonstrates Yanagihara's considerable strengths at evoking a particular milieu—clever, creative downtown types who socialize with one another perhaps too much—and that particular stage of success in which one emerges from the local into the greater world:

There had been a day, about a month after he turned thirty-eight, when Willem realized he was famous. Initially, this had fazed him less than he would have imagined, in part because he had always considered himself sort of famous—he and JB, that is. He'd be out downtown with someone, Jude or someone else, and somebody would come over to say hello to Jude, and Jude would introduce him: "Aaron, do you know Willem?" And Aaron would say, "Of course, Willem Ragnarsson. Everyone knows Willem," but it wouldn't be because of his work—it would be because Aaron's former roommate's sister had dated him at Yale, or he had two years ago done a reading for Aaron's friend's brother's friend who was a playwright, or because Aaron, who was an artist, had once been in a group show with JB and Asian Henry Young, and he'd met Willem at the after-party. New York City, for much of his adulthood, had simply been an extension of college... the entire infrastructure of which sometimes seemed to have been lifted out of Boston and plunked down within a few blocks' radius in lower Manhattan and outer Brooklyn.

But now, Willem realizes, the release of a certain film "had created a certain moment that even he recognized would transform his career." When he gets up from his table at a restaurant to go to the men's room, he notices "something different about the quality of [the other diners'] attention, its intensity and hush...." This is just right.

It's telling that Yanagihara's greatest success is a secondary character: here again, it's as if she doesn't know her own strengths. For as *A Little Life* progresses, the author seems to lose interest in everyone but the tragic victim, Jude. Malcolm, in particular, is never more than a cipher, all too obviously present to fill the biracial slot; and after a brief episode in which JB's struggle with drug addiction is very effectively chronicled, that character too fades away, reappearing occasionally as the years pass, the grand gay artist with a younger boyfriend on his arm. Overshadowing them all are the dark hints about Jude's past that accumulate ominously—and coyly. "Traditionally, men—adult men, which he didn't yet consider himself among—had been interested in him for one reason, and so he had learned to be frightened of them."

The awkwardness of "which he didn't yet consider himself among" is, I should say, pervasive. The writing in this book is often atrocious, oscillating between the incoherently ungrammatical—"his mother... had earned her doctorate in education, teaching all the while at the public school near their house that she had deemed JB better than"—and painfully strained attempts at "lyrical" effects: "His silence, so black and

total that it was almost gaseous..." You wonder why the former, at least, wasn't edited out—and why the striking weakness of the prose has gone unremarked by critics and prize juries.

Inasmuch as there's a structure here, it's that of a striptease: gradually, in a series of flashbacks, the secrets about Jude's past are uncovered until at last we get to witness the pivotal moment of abuse, a scene in which one of his many sexual tormentors, a sadistic doctor, deliberately runs him over, leaving him as much a physical cripple as an emotional one. But the wounds inflicted on Jude by the pedophile priests in the orphanage where he grew up, by the truckers and drifters to whom he is pimped out by the priest he runs away with, by the counselors and the young inmates at the youth facility where he ends up after the wicked priest is apprehended, by the evil doctor in whose torture chamber he ends up after escaping from the unhappy youth facility, are nothing compared to those inflicted by Yanagihara herself. As the foregoing catalog suggests, Jude might better have been called "Job," abandoned by his cruel creator. (Was there not one priest who noticed something, who wanted to help? Not one counselor?)

The sufferings recalled in the flashbacks are echoed in the endless array of humiliations the character is forced to endure in the present-day narrative: the accounts of these form the backbone of the novel. His lameness is mocked by JB—a particularly unbelievable plot point—with whom he subsequently breaks; he compulsively cuts

himself with razor blades, an addiction that lands him in the hospital more than once; he rejects the loving attentions of a kindly law professor who adopts him; he takes up with a sadistic male lover who beats him repeatedly and throws him and his wheelchair down a flight of stairs; his leg wounds, in time, get to the point where the limbs have to be amputated. And when Yanagihara seems to grant her protagonist a reprieve by giving him at last a loving partner—late in the novel Willem conveniently emends his sexuality and falls in love with his friend—it's merely so that she can crush him by killing Willem in a car crash, the tragedy that eventually leads him to take his own life.

You suspect that Yanagihara wanted Jude to be one of those doomed golden children around whose disintegrations certain beloved novels revolve—Sebastian Flyte, say, in *Brideshead Revisited*. But the problem with Jude is that, from the start, he's a pill: you never care enough about him to get emotionally involved in the first place, let alone affected by his demise. Sometimes I wondered whether even Yanagihara liked him. There is something punitive in the contrived and unredeemed quality of Jude's endless sufferings; it sometimes feels as if the author is working off a private emotion of her own.

Yanagihara must have known that the sheer quantity of degradation in her story was likely to alienate readers: "This is just too hard for anybody to take," her editor at Doubleday told her, according to the *Kirkus* interview, advice she was apparently proud not to take. It's interesting to speculate why she persisted. In *The People in the*

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Trees, the doctor studying the island culture recalls wishing as a child that he'd had a more traumatic childhood—one in which, indeed, the presence of a crippled brother might bring the family together. "How I yearned for such motivation!" he cries to himself as he recalls his early years. As Yanagihara recognizes in this passage, there is a deep and unadult sentimentality lurking behind that yearning; and yet she herself falls victim to it. In the end, her novel is little more than a machine designed to produce negative emotions for the reader to wallow in—unsurprisingly, the very emotions that, in her *Kirkus Reviews* interview, she listed as the ones she was interested in, the ones she felt men were incapable of expressing: fear, shame, vulnerability. Both the tediousness of *A Little Life* and, you imagine, the guilty pleasures it holds for some readers are those of a teenaged rap session, that adolescent social ritual par excellence, in which the same crises and hurts are constantly rehearsed.

We know, alas, that the victims of abuse often end up unhappily imprisoned in cycles of (self-) abuse. But to keep showing this unhappy dynamic at work is not the same as creating a meaningful narrative about it. Yanagihara's book sometimes feels less like a novel than like a seven-hundred-page-long pamphlet.

3.

Interestingly, it is because of, rather than despite, this failing that *A Little Life* has struck a nerve among critics

and readers. Jon Michaud, in *The New Yorker*, praised its "subversive" treatment of abuse and suffering, which, he asserts, lies in the book's refusal to offer "any possibility of redemption and deliverance."² Michaud singled out for notice a passage that describes Jude's love of pure mathematics, in which discipline he pursues a master's degree at one point—another in the list of his improbable accomplishments—and which, Michaud interestingly observes, takes the place of religion in Jude's unredeemable world:

Not everyone liked the axiom of equality...but he had always appreciated how elusive it was, how the beauty of the equation itself would always be frustrated by the attempts to prove it. It was the kind of axiom that could drive you mad, that could consume you, that could easily become an entire life.

(The citation allows him to conclude his review by declaring that "Yanagihara's novel can also drive you mad, consume you....") Michaud's is a kind of metacritique: the novel is to be admired not for what it does, but for what it doesn't do, for the way it bleakly defies conventional—and, by implication, sentimental—expectations of closure. But all "closure" isn't necessarily mawkish: it's what gives stories aesthetic and ethical significance. The passage that struck me as significant, by contrast, was one in which the nice law professor expounds one day in

²"The Subversive Brilliance of *A Little Life*," April 28, 2015.

class on the difference between "what is fair and what is just, and, as important, between what is fair and what is necessary." For a novel in the realistic tradition to be effective, it must obey some kind of aesthetic necessity—not least, that of even a faint verisimilitude. The abuse that Yanagihara heaps on her protagonist is neither just from a human point of view nor necessary from an artistic one.

In a related vein, Garth Greenwell in *The Atlantic* praised *A Little Life* as "the great gay novel" not because of any traditionally gay subject matter—Greenwell acknowledges that almost none of the characters or love affairs in the book are recognizably gay; it's noteworthy that when Willem discusses his affair with Jude, he declares that "I'm not in a relationship with a man...I'm in a relationship with Jude," a statement that in an earlier era would have been tagged as "denial"—but because of its technical or stylistic gestures. Yanagihara's book is, in fact, curiously reticent about the accoutrements of erotic life that many if not most gay men are familiar with, for better or worse—the pleasures of sex, the anxieties of HIV (which is barely mentioned), the omnipresence of Grindr and porn, of free-wheeling erotic energy expressed in any number of ways and available on any numbers of platforms. (When Jude tries to spice up his and Willem's sex life and orders three "manuals," some readers might wonder not in what era but on what planet he's supposed to be living.) But for Greenwell, *A Little Life* is distinguished by the way it

engages with aesthetic modes long coded as queer: melodrama, sentimental fiction, grand opera.... By violating the canons of current literary taste, by embracing melodrama and exaggeration and sentiment, it can access emotional truths denied more modest means of expression.³

Greenwell cites as examples the "elaborate metaphor" to which Yanagihara is given—as, for instance, in the phrase "the snake- and centipede-squirming muck of Jude's past."

But not everything that's excessive or exaggerated is, ipso facto, "operatic." The mad hyperbole you find in grand opera gives great pleasure, not least because the over-the-top emotions come in beautiful packages; the excess is exalting, not depressing. It is hard to see where the compensatory beauties of *A Little Life* reside. Yanagihara's language, as I've mentioned, is strained and ungainly rather than artfully baroque: as for melodrama, there isn't even drama here, let alone anything more heightened—the structure of her story is not the satisfying arc we associate with drama, one in whose shapeliness meaning is implied, but a monotonous series of assaults. It's hard to see what's so "gay" or "queer" in this dreariness.

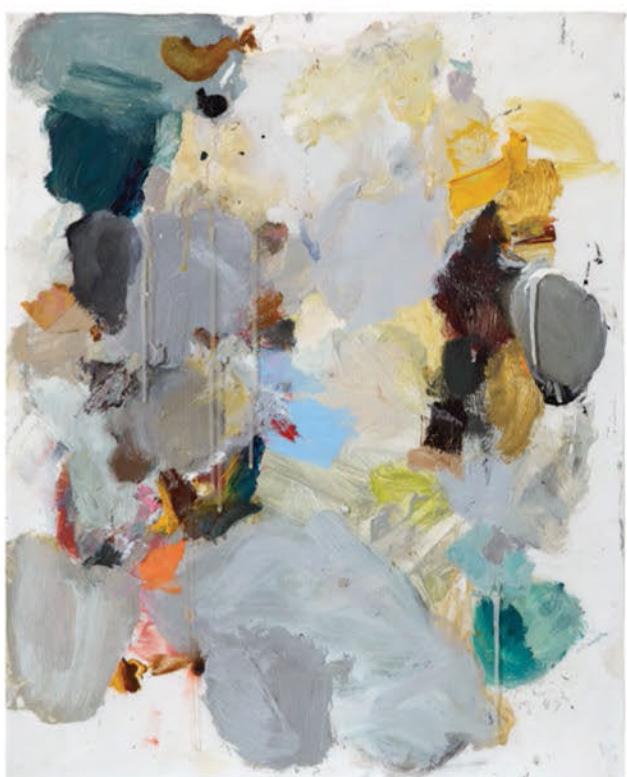
There is an odd sentimentality lurking behind accolades like Greenwell's. You wonder whether a novel written by a straight white man, one in which urban gay culture is at best sketchily described, in which male homosexual-

ity is for the second time in that author's work deeply entwined with pedophilic abuse, in which the only traditional male–male relationship is relegated to a tertiary and semicomical stratum of the narrative, would be celebrated as "the great gay novel" and nominated for the Lambda Literary Award. If anything, you could argue that this female writer's vision of male bonding revives a pre-Stonewall plot type in which gay characters are desexed, miserable, and eventually punished for finding happiness—a story that looks less like the expression of "queer" aesthetics than like the projection of a regressive and repressive cultural fantasy from the middle of the last century.

It may be that the literary columns of the better general interest magazines are the wrong place to be looking for explanations of why this maudlin work has struck a nerve among readers and critics both. Recently, a colleague of mine at Bard College—one of the models, according to *Newsweek*, for the unnamed school that the four main characters in *A Little Life* attended⁴—drew my attention to an article from *Psychology Today* about a phenomenon that has been bemusing us and other professors we know: what the article's author refers to as "declining student resilience." A symptom of this phenomenon, which has also been the subject of essays in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and elsewhere, is the striking increase in recent years in student requests for counseling in connection with the "problems of everyday life." The author cites, among other cases, those of a student "who felt traumatized because her roommate had called her a 'bitch' and two students who had sought counseling because they'd seen a mouse in their off-campus apartment."⁵

As comical as those particular instances may be, they remind you that many readers today have reached adulthood in educational institutions where a generalized sense of helplessness and acute anxiety have become the norm; places where, indeed, young people are increasingly encouraged to see themselves not as agents in life but as potential victims: of their dates, their roommates, their professors, of institutions and history in general. In a culture where victimhood has become a claim to status, how could Yanagihara's book—with its unending parade of aesthetically gratuitous scenes of punitive and humiliating violence—not provide a kind of comfort? To such readers, the ugliness of this author's subject must bring a kind of pleasure, confirming their preexisting view of the world as a site of victimization and little else.

This is a very "little" view of life. Like Jude and his abusive lover, this book and its champions seem "bound to each other by their mutual disgust and discomfort"; like the image on its cover, Yanagihara's novel has duped many into confusing anguish and ecstasy, pleasure and pain. □



Terrell James
Field Study #87, 2002
Oil on vellum, 20 x 16"

hirambutler.com

³"*A Little Life*: The Great Gay Novel Might Be Here," *The Atlantic*, May 31, 2015.

⁴Alexander Nazaryan, "Author Hanya Yanagihara's Not-So-Little Life," *Newsweek*, March 19, 2015.

⁵Peter Gray, "Declining Student Resilience: A Serious Problem for Colleges," *Psychology Today*, September 22, 2015.

Satan in Salem

John Demos

The Witches: Salem, 1692

by Stacy Schiff.

Little, Brown, 498 pp., \$32.00

Satan and Salem: The Witch-Hunt Crisis of 1692

by Benjamin C. Ray.

University of Virginia Press,

252 pp., \$29.95

1.

The story of the Salem witch-hunt of 1692 has traveled with scarcely a pause across more than three centuries. Every schoolchild knows the headlines, and many of us who are older have seen Arthur Miller's remarkable play *The Crucible*. Books on the subject would fill a sizable shelf. The town of Salem has thrived on this notorious piece of its history; to visit there today is to see witchcraft marketed shamelessly. The shadow of the accused "witches" still looms large; without it our annual observance of Halloween would be quite different.

Marketing and Halloween aside, the witch-hunt was a galvanizing event, hugely meaningful for all those involved, and tragic and traumatic in result. This is the burden of two new books, Benjamin C. Ray's *Satan and Salem: The Witch-Hunt Crisis of 1692* and Stacy Schiff's *The Witches: Salem, 1692*.^{*} Ray, a professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia, measurably deepens our knowledge of the underlying dynamics, especially the parts played by important participants. Schiff, a writer of much previous accomplishment (the best-selling *Cleopatra*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Véra*), gives the most complete narrative account we are likely to have.

2.

Sometime in the midwinter of 1691–1692 two Salem girls, Betty Parris, the nine-year-old daughter of the town minister, and Abigail Williams, her eleven-year-old cousin, began acting in "odd and...unusual" ways, "getting into holes, and creeping under chairs and stools,...[and] uttering foolish, ridiculous speeches, which neither they themselves nor any others could make sense of." Their "antic gestures" were noticed by other local girls, several of whom would soon start behaving in similar ways. As the days passed, this little group started having full-blown, convulsive "fits," in which, according to an eyewitness, "sometimes they were taken dumb, their mouths stopped, their throats choked, their limbs wracked and tormented."

A physician, called to assess their condition, ruled out the possibility of "natural disease," instead finding them to be "under an evil hand." This meant bewitchment, a not unfamiliar diagnosis in New England towns of that era. The minister (and father of little Betty), Samuel Parris, offered the culturally approved response—fasting and prayer to Almighty God. But when a neighbor

proposed something else, a folk remedy involving a "witch-cake" baked with urine taken from "the afflicted persons" and fed to the family dog, events took a different turn. Betty and Abigail "cried out of [i.e., against] the Indian woman" for afflicting them. The "Indian woman" was a household slave named Tituba; raised in the Caribbean, she had come to Massachusetts with the Parris family several years before. Within days the girls named two more village women as their "tormentors."

Local magistrates, led by Judge John Hathorne (ancestor of Nathaniel Hawthorne), who would write about the

including church members and other pillars of the community. Meanwhile the web of suspicion began to push out across the borders of Salem; eventually at least a dozen neighboring towns would disgorge their own "witches" into the rapidly spiraling mix. Jails filled with those accused and examined.

In Boston, the colony's capital, top-most officials reacted with mounting alarm; in mid-April they decided to intervene. Henceforth the prosecutorial role would be assumed by members of the ruling council, led by the lieutenant governor. As investigation continued, the torments of the afflicted girls

from accusation and examination into full-fledged trials.

The first of these focused on one Bridget Bishop, a Salem woman of notorious repute, against whom the evidence seemed especially broad and damning. The afflicted girls produced more fits; confessors described Bishop's involvement in blasphemous witch meetings; and ordinary villagers came forward with accounts of her suspicious behavior dating back decades. In short order, the jury brought in its verdict—guilty as charged—and the judges pronounced a sentence of death. (Witchcraft was a capital crime.) A week later Bishop was hanged.

What followed was a nearly month-long pause, during which ministers and others in positions of authority expressed at least tentative reservations about the proceedings so far. But near the end of June the commission decided to go forward anyway. Trials resumed; five women were convicted, four more were indicted, and examinations began for several who stood newly accused. In mid-July there were several more executions. At the start of August the commission held its third session and produced additional convictions, including that of Reverend Burroughs. This group, too, went quickly to the gallows.

In late summer the witch-hunt made its most far-reaching impact, on the nearby town of Andover. When the wife of a constable there fell ill from mysterious causes, two girls from the core group in Salem were invited to come and "tell what it was that did afflict her." Their visit directed suspicion toward a trio of local women who, under harsh questioning, confessed to witchcraft and implicated many others. Once begun, confessions multiplied astoundingly; soon there would be at least forty.

September brought one more round of trials and convictions, and then the largest of the mass hangings. This raised the year's total of those executed to twenty; meanwhile, many others languished in jail, apparently awaiting the same fate.

Around this time, however, doubt about the entire affair came fully into the open. The core of many prosecutions had been sightings of activity by the "spectral" shape of one or another suspect. Now leading ministers reconsidered their previous support for the use of such evidence. The venerable Increase Mather of Boston objected that the Devil might impersonate innocent parties, and thus delude their accusers. This put him at odds with his more celebrated son Cotton, whose widely read book *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693) offered an impassioned defense of the trials, including their reliance on "specters." As controversy mounted, Governor Phips suspended operations of the Oyer and Terminer court.

When the new year began, another court—also headed by William Stoughton—resumed trials, with a large backlog of cases carried over from the previous autumn. Most of these were quickly dismissed, and Governor Phips reprieved the rest. It took another several months for the jails to be emptied, but by mid-summer the witch-hunt was over.

There would be a long, and anguished, aftermath. Step by step, Salem



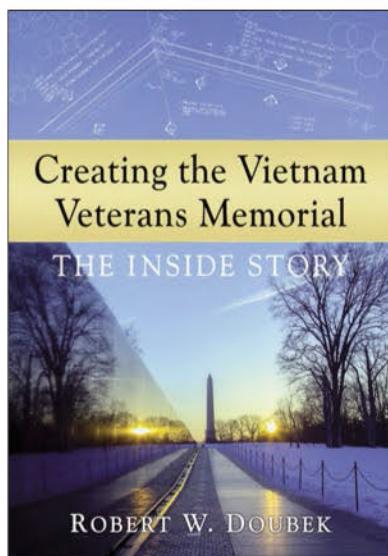
'The Trial of George Jacobs Sr. for Witchcraft, August 5, 1692'; painting by Tompkins Harrison Matteson, 1885

witch-hunt a century and a half later), began a formal "examination" of all three suspects. The opening questions set a pattern, virtually assuming guilt. "What evil spirit have you familiarity with?" they inquired. "Why do you hurt these children?" The second and third of the accused women responded with firm denials. But Tituba was coaxed and threatened (and possibly beaten by her master) into an astonishing set of confessions. She admitted to baking the witch-cake, being familiar with witchcraft "in her own country," and having repeated contacts with the Devil and his confederates. She mentioned a yellow bird, a red cat, a "great black dog," and a "thing all over hairy...that goeth like a man." She confessed that she and other witches, including the two already identified, had indeed attacked the girls in the Parris household. Moreover, she and the others had attended large witch meetings, where participants consumed "red blood and red drink" (the Devil's parody of the Christian sacrament).

These details had the effect of raising the stakes from everyday *maleficia* (particular harms inflicted on individuals) to satanic conspiracy against the entire Salem church and community. The numbers of the afflicted girls grew to seven or eight, and people throughout the village began to complain of strange encounters with witch-like apparitions. From now on, Salem would feel itself to be under siege.

As spring approached, new names were added to the list of the accused,

*I am included in Schiff's acknowledgments.



"A good read...Doubek, ...an important player..., describes the fervor, as well as the pettiness and rancor, displayed by those for and against the design"

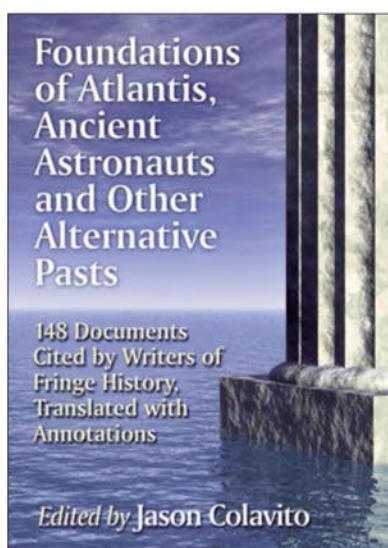
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and its neighbors struggled to understand what had happened: the judicial killings, the responsibilities abused or evaded, the injuries to body and soul, the pain of it all. Individuals wrongly accused sought moral and financial redress. Judges, jurymen, and at least one of the afflicted girls made public apologies. (However, others in and around Salem held firm to their original position, insisting that Satan had indeed found willing followers in their midst.) Eventually the colony's General Court passed a bill of attainder, nullifying most of the convictions, and—as late as the 1730s—offered reparations to some of “the families as were in a manner ruined in the mistaken mismanagement of the terrible affair called witchcraft.”

3.

All this, and much, much more, is carefully laid out in Schiff's *The Witches*. Her research is impeccable; no previous writer has scoured the documentary record to such great depth. Moreover, she has mastered the entire history of early New England—from long before to well after the year of the witch-hunt. At relevant points she reaches across the Atlantic to include European witchcraft as well. This enables her to provide deep, richly textured background for specific moments and situations. Indeed, readers may experience her narrative as a virtual tour of the time and place.

Her recreation of courtroom scenes is especially convincing; one feels, almost palpably, their pulsating mix of words, actions, and—above all—emotion. The fits of the afflicted girls, the sharp tone of the prosecutors, the excitement of the numerous bystanders, the look of the spaces involved, the weather and the landscape outdoors, the tension in the very air breathed by one and all: Schiff misses no opportunity.

She offers, too, some vivid biographical sketchwork. The leading participants in the hunt—accusers and accused, magistrates and victims, ministers such as Parris, the Mathers, the unfortunate “ringleader” Burroughs, government officials like Phips—come to life in deftly told personal stories.

Schiff's skills as a writer extend to such formal matters as structure, pacing, and point of view. The various parts of the narrative unfold in apparently seamless succession. At some points they speed up, at others slow down; however, a reader feels no bumps or jarring turns along the way. She moves in for close-ups and draws back for overviews. Now and again she inhabits her characters, yet she maintains throughout the authority of an omniscient narrator who is firmly in charge.

With so much to appreciate in Schiff's work, it seems surprising to find any fault. But there is one, and it's not unimportant. Her preferred tone is irony, a kind of tongue-in-cheek playfulness in which bits of behavior or speech are oddly juxtaposed. When witches changed themselves into animal forms, they showed “a particular fondness for yellow birds.” As compared with New England witches, those in Europe “had more fun. They walked on their hands.... They rode hyenas to bacchanals deep in the forest.” In beleaguered Andover “a swarm of superstitions nested under the plain Puritan

floorboards.” Cotton Mather sometimes wrote about himself “in the third person, a different brand of transparent, out-of-body experience.” A county sheriff “wore himself out dismantling the households of the accused.”

Examples of such stylistic practice abound in Schiff's pages. Often enough, they are pleasingly clever, things to chuckle over. But here and there they shade toward parody, even mockery. And in this, they jibe with certain longer passages as well. A paragraph on New England medical practice offers a dizzying list of such “excellent” remedies as

beetle's blood, fox lung...dried dolphin heart...the fat of a



Winona Ryder in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, directed by Nicholas Hytner, 1996

roasted hedgehog dripped into the ear... sixty drops of lavender and a mouthful of gingerbread...a wolf-skin girdle...burnt black-cow dung or frog-liver powder administered five times daily...a brew of breast milk and the blood from an amputated tomcat ear.

By the end it feels like piling on.

Schiff also attempts broad characterizations of “the Puritan”—presumably a type—as “wary and watchful,” “intensely alert, preternaturally attentive, neurotically vigilant about the state of his soul,” gripped by “an obsession with causality,” and so on. At such points her portrayal amounts to caricature—indeed the same one that has long clung to the figure of (again) “the Puritan.”

4.

Schiff's book is long on narrative, and somewhat short on explanation. To be sure, she does point to the “feverish circumstances” surrounding life for “the adolescent” (in this case the afflicted girls), the possible impact of “conversion disorder,” the way “the adults transfigured...adolescent distress,” and a pattern of feuding among various and sundry Salemites before the witch-hunts started. But it is with Benjamin Ray's *Satan and Salem* that explanation comes fully to the fore. Ray joins a host of previous investigators bent on discovering whys and wherefores. What were the leading causes of the witch-hunt? Why did it go to such extremes? Who was ultimately responsible?

People of the time, when reconsidering the trials, usually cited the “mysterious providence” of God; in effect,

they blamed themselves for His allowing Satan to come down on them with such terrible force. In their minds, the witch-hunt was nothing less, or more, than divine retribution for their own sins and shortcomings.

After the eighteenth century, when such heavily supernatural thinking waned, witchcraft historians proposed a range of more earthbound causes. Possibly there was outright deception and fraud by the afflicted girls, colonial “bobbysoxers” on the loose. Or perhaps it was class-based oppression, with the clergy and other authorities using accusations of witchery to hold the “common people” in thrall. What about mental illness—the power of mass hysteria—starting with teenagers

folk living in the town's interior. The trials, then, can be seen as a backlash phenomenon, a struggle to ward off deep-rooted social change—nothing less, in fact, than the onset of modern capitalism and the values it advanced.

A second book, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (2002), by Mary Beth Norton, traced a very different line of influence. Norton discovered that many of the trial participants—afflicted victims, alleged witches, and prosecutors alike—had previously lived on what was then a settlement frontier in coastal Maine. That region had long been prone to warfare with Indians, some of it horrific, all of it deeply unsettling. The result was a kind of post-traumatic stress disorder that refugees brought with them when they moved down to Salem. "Indian devils" and witch devils converged, and amplified each other, in the panicked psyches of some who pursued the witch-hunt.

Benjamin Ray begins his investigation by disavowing the views offered in much previous explanatory work; not for him such "global" theories as ergotism, mass hysteria, culture clash, and capitalism. Instead, he views the witch-hunt as "a multivalent societal tragedy" involving "a perfect storm of factors." He focuses more on "how the witch trials unfolded and less on the question of why, which...often results in a simplistic verdict of a single cause." This points him toward "particular decisions and motives of individuals and groups...as well as a number of particular circumstances." "Particular" is, for certain, his watchword. □

His book is unshapely in form, his prose graceless (in great contrast to Schiff's), but his nose-to-the-ground method does yield results. He is especially effective at showing links between the different categories of participants. He stresses the importance of "collaborative effort" in moving things along, and concludes that "the local legal and religious establishment... was fully behind the prosecutions." He believes that "their families and the authorities...stage-managed the girls' actions at every step of the way." Indeed, he pays especially close attention to the details of their bewitchment. He asks how much of all they said and did was "deliberately contrived." Most previous historians of the witch-hunt have given the girls the benefit of any doubt, persuaded by the extreme nature of their distress. Ray takes a more nuanced position. Often, he thinks they were responding to cues embedded in the magistrates' questions. In at least one case, their behavior looks quite calculated ("hardly hysterical"). Yet at other points he sees them as driven by the "trauma" of their own participation.

Not surprisingly for a professor of religious studies, Ray gives full credit—or blame—to the force of Puritan belief. Fear of Satan, and fear of God too, lay at the heart of New England culture. Ray sees Reverend Parris as "a dedicated agent for the prosecution" whose "foreboding sermons had created the perfect climate" for witch-hunting. "We are either Saints, or Devils," Parris affirmed—a binary distinction that could only sharpen antagonisms. Further in the background, but still of much importance, loomed

religious controversy. Parris strongly opposed the so-called Halfway Covenant, a liberalizing tendency that had already overtaken many Puritan churches and was approved by some of his own congregation.

In a particularly telling chapter Ray examines the role of confession. Previous witch trials had made this the primary ground for findings of guilt—and thus for execution. But Salem reversed the pattern; there the lives of those who confessed were spared. The judges held them in jail, hoping to obtain their additional testimony for use in subsequent trials. Moreover, confession appeared to drain the witch's power to afflict; her supposed victims were suddenly calmed. In time, the accused drew the obvious conclusion: confess, in order to save oneself. Thus most confessions were at once voluntary and coerced. Eventually, their specious nature was recognized; this was another part of ending the witch-hunt.

Ray's list of essential "factors" goes on and on. Near the end, he uses digital mapping of "geospatial conditions," to show the plague-like way that accusations spread. This highlights the "interaction...between four basic social networks," including two different subgroups within Salem, the ministers, government officials, and the townspeople of Andover. From first to last, connection remains Ray's key to understanding the witch-hunt.

5.

Ray's choice to concentrate on "how" is a sound one. But the "why" won't go

away. Why did the witch-hunt happen in Salem? Many other New England communities were struggling with a very similar range of tensions and conflicts, their own versions of "a perfect storm." And why in 1692? Witchcraft cases had occurred previously here and there across the region, but none of such breadth and depth, and hardly any after the 1660s. There was something special about this witch-hunt, something not quite revealed by asking "how."

And why do we still care, after all these years? Let the two authors have a final say. Here is Ray, on the legacy of the accused:

Salem's victims, who faced death rather than confess to a lie, have left an indelible mark on American moral consciousness.... It is this pathos and humanity...that has carried the story down through three centuries as one of the most vivid moral narratives in... America's historical imagination.

Here is Schiff at her most eloquent, on connections to the present:

We too have been known to prefer plot to truth; to deny the evidence before us in favor of the ideas behind us; to do insane things in the name of reason; to take that satisfying step from the righteous to the self-righteous; to drown our private guilts in a public well; to indulge in a little delusion.

Courage and weakness; honor and shame; love and hate; life and death: examples that are telling to us all. □



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The Syrian Kurds Are Winning!

Jonathan Steele

Out of Nowhere:

The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War

by Michael M. Gunter.

London: Hurst, 169 pp., \$50.00

(distributed in the US by

Oxford University Press)

Anyone searching for a sliver of light in the darkness of the Syrian catastrophe has no better place to go than the country's northeast. There some 2.2 million Kurds have created a quasi state that is astonishingly safe—and strangely unknown abroad. No barrel bombs are dropped by Bashar al-Assad's warplanes. No ISIS executioners enforce the wearing of the niqab. No Turkish air strikes send civilians running, as Turkish attacks on Kurdish militia bases do across the border in Iraq.

Safety is of course a relative concept. Car bombs and suicide attacks by ISIS assassins regularly take lives in this predominantly Kurdish 250-mile-wide stretch of Syria between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, but by the standards of the rest of the country it is quiet.

The 2.2 million Kurds make up a tenth of the Syrian population. During the protests of 2011—the Arab Spring—they, like their Arab counterparts in other Syrian cities, publicly demonstrated for reform in Qamishli, the region's largest city. But Assad was milder toward them than he was to other protesters elsewhere. He gave citizenship to 300,000 stateless Kurds and in July 2012 even withdrew most of his combat troops from the area on the grounds that they were needed more urgently in the Syrian heartland of Aleppo, Damascus, and the cities in between.

Kurdish militias known as the People's Protection Units (YPG) quickly organized the support of much of the Kurdish adult population under thirty and took control of the region, which they divide into three "cantons" and which they call Rojava (i.e., West, meaning western Kurdistan, from *roj*, the Kurdish word for sun). The other Kurdish regions are in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.

Over the next three years the YPG trained and built a well-disciplined, though lightly armed, military force and set up an efficient system of local government. It is a measure of the Assads' repression that, whereas in Turkey bans on the Kurdish language were lifted in 1991, they were kept in place for another two decades in Syria. As a result most adults in Rojava speak better Arabic than Kurdish. Now in charge of their own statelet, Kurdish leaders are reviving the use of the Kurdish language in schools and on TV and radio stations.

The language, Kurmanji, belongs to the Indo-European family and is akin to Farsi but distinct from Arabic or Turkish. Unlike Arabs and Turks but like Iranians, Kurds celebrate the New Year, Newroz, on the first day of spring.

The Kurds are originally a mountain people, who emerged near Lake Van in eastern Turkey. Their most famous warrior, Saladin, who captured Jerusalem from the Crusaders, was active with his regiments along the Mediterranean in the twelfth century. Many settled in Damascus and Aleppo.

Under the Ottoman Empire Kurdish identity was not threatened, and it was natural that when the empire collapsed at the end of World War I Kurds hoped to create an independent state. In the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 they were promised a state by the British and other Western powers but Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish leader, refused to implement the treaty and the Western powers changed their line. Kurds were marginalized in Turkey. After several failed rebellions in the 1920s thousands fled to Syria. There, under the French mandate, Kurds were privileged over

nized religion. Most Kurdish clerics are Sufis of the Sunni branch of Islam and, in contrast to the Syrian Arab opposition to Assad, none of the dozen Kurdish political parties in Syria is Islamist.

In spite of the huge attention given to Syria's war by international media, no foreign diplomats or businesspeople and only a handful of reporters have made the trip to Rojava. The first, albeit brief, coverage came in September of last year, from across the Turkish border. That was after ISIS fighters swept north from Raqqa, the head-

dred yards of the battle and did nothing to help.

Gradually, the Kurdish fighters prevailed and in January of this year ISIS withdrew, though it took another three months to drive them out of the villages south of Kobanî. As many as a thousand ISIS fighters were thought to have died. The YPG had shown it was the most successful group of fighters with whom the US could ally in Syria and open cooperation now exists. There was a second crucial lesson: using airpower makes little sense without an infantry force, preferably of local people, to follow up on the bombing.

In July of this year the YPG, again with the aid of US airpower, drove ISIS out of Tal Abyad, another town on the border with Turkey. This meant ISIS had lost two of the three crossing points from Turkey through which it could bring foreign volunteers, finance, and weaponry to strengthen the jihad.

Idriss Nassan, the Kurdish spokesperson of the Kobanî canton, told me that the YPG now plans to liberate the last ISIS border-crossing point into Turkey at the town of Jarabulus. The YPG are dug in on the east bank of the Euphrates and it will be difficult to move forward. But success would be a strategic blow to ISIS, severely limiting its power. It would also upset Turkey, which fears a further strengthening of the statelet that the Kurds have set up along more than half of the Syrian-Turkish border. If the Kurds were to take control of the area from Jarabulus to Azaz, they could link the cantons of Jazira and Kobanî with Rojava's third canton, the enclave of Afrin, which is largely populated by Kurds, creating a Kurdish zone along almost the entire length of Syria's northern border. Since the Turks are now taking a hard line toward the Kurdish PKK within their own borders, they are anxious to prevent a strong new Kurdish entity emerging in Syria.

The Turks have said they want a no-fly zone, policed by Turkish and US warplanes, to be established in the very area from Jarabulus to Azaz that the Kurds want to take from ISIS and other jihadis. Turkish officials in Ankara claim that the no-fly scheme would block the Syrian air force and create a haven for Syrian civilians escaping Assad's attacks. The Kurds see the scheme as a device to permit the Turks to bomb any YPG fighters who enter the area.

The US seems to have seen through Turkey's ruse and refuses to support the no-fly zone idea. Much now depends on whether the US will back a YPG advance to Jarabulus with air strikes. Asked if the US has given the YPG a green light, Nassan, speaking for the Kobanî canton, was upbeat. "Sipan Hamo, the YPG commander, has said we're going to liberate Jarabulus and, when he says this, he's co-ordinated with the US because we're part of its international coalition," he said.

In mid-October, US aircraft dropped ammunition and weapons for the Kurds and their allies from local Arab and Turkmen tribes. It was a significant escalation of US military aid, and a few days later Turkey's Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu announced that Turkey had



Kurdish fighters in the Women's Protection Unit during their daily drills at Shilan Camp, in the border region of Andıvar, Rojava, Syria, summer 2015

the Arab majority, particularly in getting jobs in the army and police.

After Syria won its independence in 1946 the public projection of a separate Kurdish culture was repressed by the new Arab rulers, even though other minorities—Armenian, Assyrian, and Druze—were recognized. Syrian Kurds were Arabized and influenced by the modernizing ideology of urban Syria. Today they show few signs of their mountain origins or tribal affiliations. Whereas older men in Iraqi Kurdistan often wear sirwal—baggy trousers held up by a cummerbund—the costume is rarely seen in Rojava.

But the dream of having a state of their own has never faded. With around 32 million people worldwide, they are the largest ethnic group without one. Retaining this aspiration is the key factor that has kept Kurds tough and self-reliant through decades of repression in the four countries where they are numerous. After Iraq, where Kurds have enjoyed autonomy in the north since 1991, and Turkey, where the militant PKK has been fighting for Kurdish autonomy since 1984, the Kurds of Syria saw their first real opportunity for change as late as 2011.

At all levels of Syrian Kurdish society there is now a strong desire to reverse the last half-century of assimilationist pressures and revive their cultural heritage, particularly the Kurdish language and literature and the celebration of Newroz with Kurdish music and dancing. Syrian Kurds put greater store on national identity than orga-

nizers of their newly declared caliphate, and launched a surprise attack on the Kurdish canton of Kobanî. They captured dozens of Kurdish villages, executed scores of people who didn't have time to escape, and moved toward the large town of Kobanî, which sits on Syria's border with Turkey.

The Kurdish YPG forces resisted as best they could with the help of seasoned guerrillas from the PKK. After desperate pleas for help from the YPG as well as from Washington's allies in the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq, the US started bombing ISIS positions on the approaches to Kobanî. Several dozen Kurdish fighters from Iraq—called peshmerga—also joined the fighting. In spite of the US air strikes the ISIS advance continued and by October its militants were inside the town of Kobanî as they poured reinforcements from Raqqa into the battle.

This was the first sustained engagement between US airpower and ISIS, and reporters from across the world who were camped just inside Turkey filmed ISIS artillery strikes and the much larger plumes of smoke caused by US bombs and missiles. With most of Kobanî's civilian population fleeing into Turkey, cameras also broadcast the first pictures of vast streams of Kurdish Syrian refugees escaping northward, a harbinger of the broader flight of refugees to come a year later. Meanwhile, Turkish tanks and armored personnel carriers patrolled the Kobanî border within a few hun-

struck the YPG twice. He was not specific but the attacks appeared to be from machine guns firing across the border. There were no reports of casualties, and the attacks seemed designed as a political message. Davutoğlu said Turkey had told Russia and the US that YPG forces would not be permitted to proceed beyond the Euphrates. In an apparent rebuke to the Turkish prime minister, John Kerry told a Washington audience on October 28: “We’re...enhancing our air campaign in order to help drive Da’esh [ISIS], which once dominated the Syria–Turkey border, out of the last seventy-mile stretch that it controls.” Two days later, Obama announced he was ordering up to fifty US special forces into Rojava to help the YPG and allied local militias to fight ISIS.

Nassan’s office is in the western sector of Kobanî, in one of the few public buildings that remain intact. Elsewhere the streets are lined with ruins, looking like pancakes of concrete, crushed by US bombs and missiles. Civilian casualties were minimal since most people had fled as soon as ISIS appeared.

Kobanî and the surrounding canton with its 380 villages had a pre-war population of 300,000, but by the time of the ISIS attack it had swollen to 500,000 thanks to an influx of Arabs, Armenians, Turkmen, and Kurds fleeing from other Syrian cities. Some 150,000 have already returned, according to Nassan, though it was impossible to verify his figure. The town’s bazaar is busy and the streets are full of women and children. Families are back.

The Kobanî refugees escaping ISIS included Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old toddler whose lifeless body, face-

down on a Turkish beach, provoked a worldwide wave of sympathy for Syria’s refugees this summer. Few news reports mentioned that he was a Kurd and some Syrian opposition sources used his plight to claim, falsely, that his parents were taking him and his older brother to escape Assad’s barrel bombs, not ISIS.

The child’s remains, along with those of his brother and mother, are buried under gray marble slabs in Kobanî’s cemetery beside small evergreen trees planted in old tins that used to contain cooking oil. His father, Abdullah, got special permission from the Turkish authorities to bring his family’s bodies across the border, but no such allowance was given to the dozens of foreign journalists who accompanied him from Bodrum. Nor does Turkey allow international aid workers to cross into Kobanî for reconstruction and the clearing of unexploded bombs and shells. In order to circumvent this harsh embargo, they have to use the only route available for visiting the region, which goes via a flat-bottom boat or a ride on a narrow pontoon bridge across the Tigris from Iraqi Kurdistan, followed by a long day’s drive on potholed roads.

Since its withdrawal from Kobanî, ISIS has changed tactics. It uses suicide bombings and hit-and-run attacks, which are less liable to be targeted by US air strikes than large groups of fighters and armored vehicles. Shortly before dawn one night in June a group of ISIS fighters slipped into Kobanî, wearing YPG uniforms to avoid detection. They shot and killed nearly two hundred civilians before taking refuge in a city-center school. It took several days to push them out.

Syrian Kurdish militia leaders pride themselves on being not only a secular guerrilla force with no religious ideology but an army with gender equality, with women in combat on the front line. Fidan Zinar, who took command of the YPJ (Women’s Protection Units) in Kobanî a week before the ISIS raid in June, told me that she used to be a housewife in a small Syrian town. She joined the YPJ three years ago, “first of all to defend myself, then my culture, my language, my people, and our homeland.” A veteran of several clashes with ISIS, she said:

In some operations we work as a separate women’s unit, sometimes we are with male units. We can’t say we’re confident that ISIS won’t come back again. They still have agents and sleeper cells here, and there are gaps in our defenses. But they can’t make an all-out attack; [they can] only penetrate in small groups or use car bombs.

In Kobanî’s military hospital I met a young woman with her left arm in a bandage. Asmin Siterk had been wounded in a battle at the end of July to drive ISIS fighters out of Sarrin, a town on the Euphrates some fifty miles south of Kobanî. “We were in a mixed group of soldiers,” she told me. “Several men were wounded as well as me. There were six martyrs in our group, two women and four men.”

On the drive back east there was further evidence of women’s military contributions. Women in combat fatigues shared the job of examining drivers’ credentials at the numerous check-

points. Photographs of “martyrs”—troops killed in battle—were displayed at every military post, and a good number were women. In Qamishli, Amina Ossi, the deputy minister for foreign relations in the YPG canton of Jazira, estimated the number of YPG and YPJ fighters as 50,000 and the number of martyrs in the last three years as three thousand. Half of each category were women, she said.

It was on the way to Amina’s office that I came across an initially baffling sight. A statue of Hafez al-Assad, the former Syrian president and founder of the Assad dynasty, stood unmolested at a city-center roundabout. Nearby two photographs of his son, Bashar, were on display in the front windows of Syrianair. While Kurds fly their own red, green, and yellow flag throughout the region, the Syrian national flag was hoisted above a lane of concrete blocks leading to the entrance of a small garrison.

Here is one of the complexities of the Syrian war. The regime retains control of roughly one tenth of Qamishli, plus the local airport and the connecting road as well as the Arab part of the town of Hasakah, some fifty miles to the south. This symbolic toehold allows it to claim that it still controls the capitals of all Syrian provinces except Raqqa, which is held by ISIS, and Idlib, which is held by other extreme Islamists, including Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham. In return the Kurds benefit by having Damascus continuing to pay the salaries of the Kurdish region’s teachers, hospital doctors, and other public-sector workers. Civil aircraft under control of the Assad regime

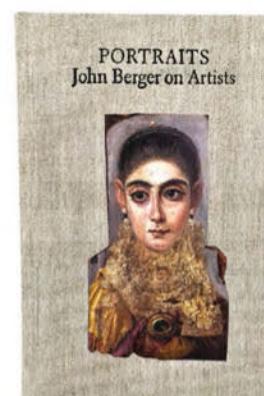


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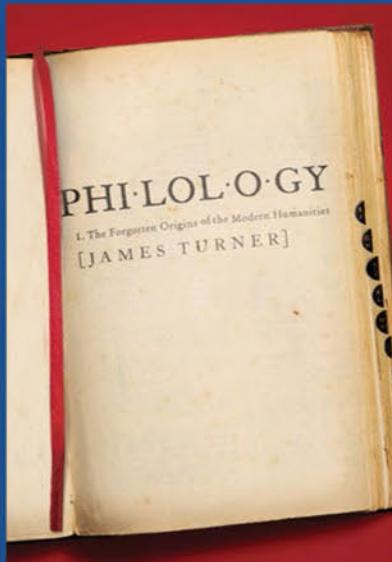
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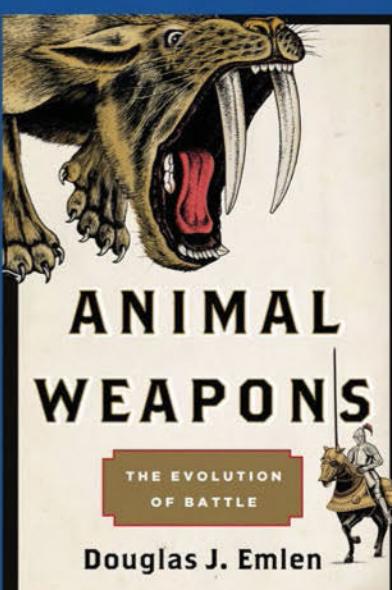


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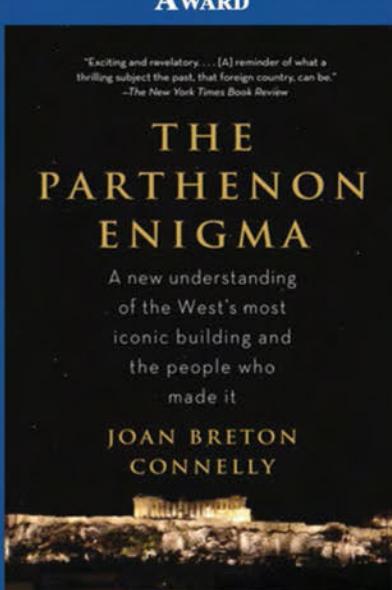
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still fly regularly from Qamishli to Damascus and Lattakia. For students enrolled there and for businessmen this provides a useful link, since overground travel has become too dangerous.

Rojava contains some of the most fertile land in Syria, planted with wheat, cotton, and vegetables. It also has oil, although the “nodding donkeys”—the pumps that pull it out of the ground—stand idle now for lack of investment and maintenance. But most basic goods, as well as medicines in the Kurdish region’s pharmacies, are brought from Damascus on trucks that pass through ISIS territory. This is another of Syria’s complexities. ISIS leaders prefer to tax the drivers rather than block them and put the Kurdish region under siege, which could provoke more armed conflict with the Kurds.

ing with the [Syrian] regime. Some are Baathist. Others are from local Arab tribes. There are also the National Defense Forces—a volunteer militia that Assad created two years ago to supplement the dwindling supply of conscripts. Using the Arabic acronym Da’esh for ISIS, he went on: “When Da’esh came into Hasakah, many regime units switched to Da’esh’s side. There are also many Da’esh spies within the regime.”

As with the ISIS counterattack after retreating from Kobanî, ISIS showed that it still has the mobility to cause casualties and terror in Hasakah. A week before my visit to the town an ISIS team in a car full of explosives blew themselves up at a checkpoint outside the front of Lawand Rojava’s headquarters, killing three soldiers. Two days

been in a Turkish prison ever since.

Saleh Muslim, a native of Kobanî, was in a Syrian prison for a time as an activist after the PYD took part in anti-regime demonstrations in Qamishli in 2004. On release he made his way to a PKK camp in the Qandil mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, and returned to Syria in April 2011 just as the new wave of anti-regime protests got underway.

The United States and the European Union designate the PKK as a terrorist group but they have been careful not to do the same with the PYD. Saleh Muslim meets regularly with US diplomats and was invited to meet Turkish officials in Istanbul in July 2013, when he assured them that the PYD was not seeking independence from Syria for Rojava.



Some activists in anti-Assad opposition groups claim that the Assad regime’s presence in Qamishli shows that the Kurds are collaborators. The point is vigorously rejected by Kurdish officials, who say they have two enemies, ISIS and Turkey, that pose a more immediate threat than Assad. ISIS fighters continue to attack them wherever they can. Turkey is a looming presence that might send its troops or aircraft across the border at any time. “War is a matter of strategy and tactics. You can’t fight on too many fronts,” Lawand Rojava, a YPG commander in Hasakah, told me.

The [Assad] regime has aircraft and uses barrel bombs. Why should we risk our people’s lives by attacking the regime’s base here, just to prove to the world that we are not allies of the regime? We have to think about the interests of the people. The regime also thinks strategically. We have had many clashes with the regime but they’re not attacking us now.

Hasakah came under assault from ISIS as recently as June. The ISIS fighters infiltrated the Arab part of town and attacked the regime’s forces. Syrian government aircraft responded, but the YPG held back. Only when ISIS moved into the Kurdish districts did the YPG call in US air strikes. Under the combined weight of YPG ground troops and US airpower ISIS was eventually pushed back but the YPG and YPJ lost fifty people, according to Lawand Rojava. He was not complimentary about the Syrian army’s performance. “There are,” he said, “various militias fight-

earlier a suicide bomber killed twenty civilians at another checkpoint, and in a separate incident a bomber killed forty-three civilians in a crowded shopping street. Kurdish journalists in Qamishli were unaware of the atrocities, an apparent sign that the Kurdish authorities try to restrict bad news.

In Remelan, a small Syrian town close to the border of Iraq and Turkey, I went to see Saleh Muslim, the copresident of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the largest Syrian Kurdish party, who is in effect the region’s political leader. The YPG militias are the PYD’s armed wing. As Michael Gunter describes in *Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War*, the PYD began in 2003 as the Syrian branch of the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party. (Though completed before ISIS’s emergence and the start of US bombing, the book is an admirably lucid survey of the Syrian Kurds’ history and prospects.) Hafez al-Assad had given the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan sanctuary in Syria in 1979. The move was partly to have a bargaining chip in dealings with Turkey but also, in Gunter’s words, “in return for... keeping the lid on Syria’s Kurds.... Assad allowed Syrian Kurds to join the PKK in lieu of serving in the Syrian army.”

This modus vivendi lasted until 1998 when Turkey threatened to go to war unless Syria expelled the PKK. Assad gave way and sent Öcalan and his fighters out of the country. Most of Öcalan’s guerrillas moved to northern Iraq. Öcalan himself sought refuge in various countries, eventually flying to Kenya, where he was captured in 1999 in a joint US-Turkish operation. He has

Saleh Muslim’s soft-spoken manner and modest demeanor belie the steel and determination that have helped him turn the PYD into an unexpectedly powerful political and military force. While supporting Assad’s replacement by a national unity government, he has no doubt that the immediate threat comes from ISIS, and that foreign governments need to give priority to ISIS in defining their objectives in Syria. Asked if the Assad regime was close to being toppled by ISIS, he told me: “If it collapses because of the Salafis [i.e., ISIS], it would be a disaster for everyone. If it collapses by agreement with other forces, it would be all right.”

He argued that there should be talks between the regime and the non-Islamist forces such as the Kurds with the aim of reaching a political deal, since neither side could eliminate the other, but there was no prospect of negotiating with ISIS, since they did not believe in compromise. “For Da’esh and people with their mentality you cannot think of any way of ending them except via military force.... We wouldn’t feel safe in our homes as long as there is one Da’esh person left alive. They are an enemy of humanity.”

Muslim was speaking to me when the Russian military build-up in Lattakia was underway but before the Russian air strikes started and Assad met with Vladimir Putin in Moscow. Saleh Muslim has regular contacts with Russian diplomats, as he has with Americans, and said he had been assured by senior Russian officials on a visit to Moscow in September that Russia would not bring ground troops to fight in Syria. “We and

our allies among the Arabs have said many times we don't agree to have foreign armies in Syria, or any invasion by any side. If the Russians break through on this, it means a kind of invasion and our people won't agree to it."

He favored coordination between the US and Russian air forces. As long as it was not designed exclusively to support the Assad regime, he saw no reason why the US should not coordinate with the Syrian army and provide air cover if it launched ground offensives against ISIS since defeating ISIS, in his view, took priority over replacing Assad's regime.

He foresaw the day when the Syrian Kurdish militias could close the last ISIS crossing point from Turkey at Jarabulus. The YPG could then even move on ISIS's capital in Raqqa "with the help of others."

The PYD's relationship with the other main Kurdish parties in the region is complicated. It denies having organic links to the PKK in Turkey, though it reveres the PKK's imprisoned leader, Abdullah Öcalan. His picture is prominently displayed in public offices and at military checkpoints, even sometimes on badges on soldiers' shoulders, and he is referred to as "Apo" (Uncle).

The PYD's links to the ruling parties in Iraqi Kurdistan are polite but cool, partly for ideological reasons since the PYD is left-wing and the Iraqi parties are center-right but mainly because the PYD insists on monopolizing decision-making in their own region. A recent meeting between Saleh Muslim and the Iraqi Kurdish president, Masoud

Barzani, which was organized and attended by Brett McGurk, the US special envoy to the anti-ISIS coalition, was aimed at getting Muslim to agree that a few thousand US-trained peshmerga in Iraq who owe loyalty to smaller Syrian Kurdish parties would be allowed to cross from Iraq and join the struggle. Muslim insisted that they come under YPG command and the meeting failed.

The PYD is facing criticism from some supporters. There is war weariness and anxiety over the long periods of military service for young men and women. I found people grumbling over a new decree that puts under government control properties left empty by those who have fled abroad. Officials insist that this is not expropriation but a measure designed to assess the scale of vacant buildings and rehouse people who have abandoned vulnerable villages for the safety of the main towns. If the owners return, they will get their houses back.

In his book, Gunter points out that the Assads maintained an artificial Arab Belt (al-Hizam al-Arabi) along the Turkish border by settling Arabs in new villages there with the aim of separating Syria's Kurds from the Kurds of southern Turkey. Arab and Turkmen refugees, now in Turkey, have recently claimed that the PYD is engaging in ethnic cleansing, forced deportation, and demolition of houses. Some of these charges have been taken up by Amnesty International. PYD officials deny that they are destroying the Arab Belt. They say that some villages had to be abandoned for security reasons because their inhabitants sympathized with ISIS fighters when they infiltrated it; when

ISIS left, the Arabs and Turkmen voluntarily fled for fear of being suspected by the Kurds of having helped ISIS and harboring "sleeper cells."

What is Rojava's future? Militarily, it seems relatively secure. ISIS has suffered much at the YPG's hands over the last year and is unlikely to want to repeat the experience of confronting them, although ISIS will fight to retain Jarabulus, its last crossing point to Turkey. Besides, ISIS's long-term ambition is not focused on the Kurds but on Arab regions, whether in Syria, Iraq, or beyond those two countries, in Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Turkey is the joker in the deck. The peace talks between Turkey and the PKK broke down this summer and Turkey resumed its air strikes on PKK bases. I asked Saleh Muslim if he was afraid of a Turkish military intervention at some point. After all, Rojava is a long and thin slice of land on Turkey's borders that is only lightly defended by 50,000 Kurdish militia troops. "Two years ago I was most afraid of a Turkish intervention, but Turkey is not so free to do that now," he replied, apparently confident that Washington's alliance with the YPG in the struggle against ISIS has limited Turkey's options.

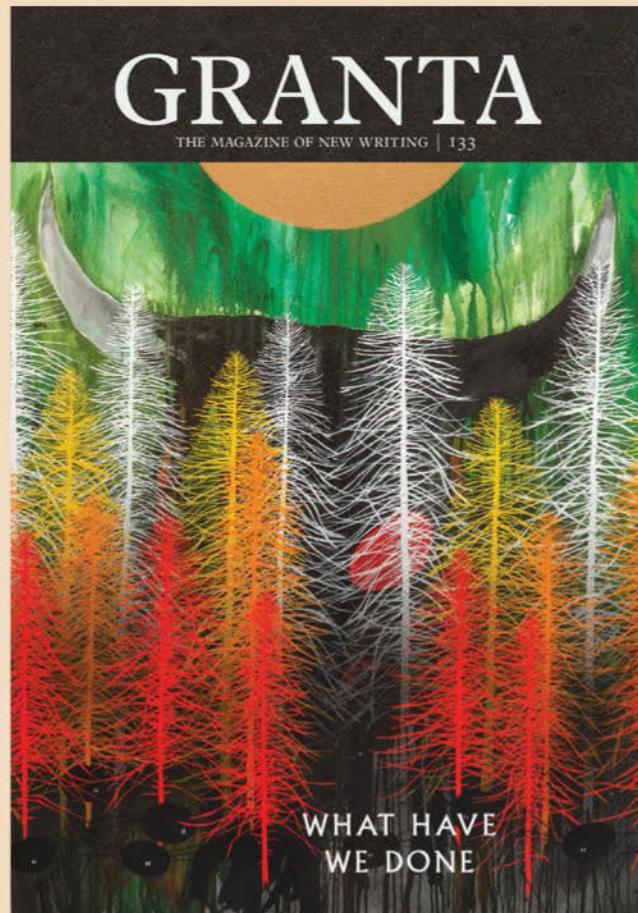
Like most Kurds in Rojava—and I heard the same from Iraqi Kurdish officials in Erbil—Saleh Muslim believes that Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan's recent attacks on the PKK were designed to win Turkish nationalist support for his party in the parliamentary elections on November 1. If that was Erdogan's strategy, it worked

handsomely. The opposition Nationalist Action Party (MHP) lost forty of its eighty seats and Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) surged to an outright majority in parliament after a campaign in which it insisted that it alone could give Turkey stability and security. The question now is whether Erdogan continues his attacks on the PKK and, by extension, the Syrian Kurds, or resumes the peace process with the PKK.

Whatever Erdogan decides, there appears to be no chance that Rojava will ever go back under Arab control as fully as it was before 2011. Before the Geneva talks in 2014, the last occasion when the UN brokered negotiations between the Syrian government and its opponents, the Syrian Kurds insisted on coming as a separate delegation and refused to join the opposition coalition when they were told they had to join with others. After almost five years of war Syria is fragmented, and it is unclear whether Damascus will ever be restored as a powerful seat of central government. The best that can be expected is a devolved federal system, either by a formal constitutional change or merely de facto.

Rule from Damascus may be replaced by competing rulers or warlords in different cities. Whoever they are, whether Islamist or secular, no set of Arab rulers will easily be accepted again by Syria's Kurds. Their language is being revived. They run their own education system and have an authentic local media. They have tasted the benefits of autonomy and will resist any attempt to have all this extinguished. □

—November 4, 2015



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A Very Different Salomé

Ingrid D. Rowland

Salomé

by Oscar Wilde, adapted and directed by Yaël Farber for the Shakespeare Theatre Company in the Women's Voices Theater Festival, at the Lansburgh Theatre, Washington, D.C., October 6–November 8, 2015

The fortress of Machaerus in the Jordanian desert has stood in ruins ever since the Romans razed it in the year 72. But even in its heyday, Machaerus was nothing more than a grim hilltop fort overlooking the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, its four watchtowers keeping a wary eye on Petra to the south and Philadelphia (today's Amman) to the north. It was the perfect place to lock a troublemaker in prison and hope that the world would forget about him.

Sometime around the year 30, in the reign of the emperor Tiberius, the puppet ruler Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea, began to worry about the presence of just such a troublemaker on the western border of his territories: a fellow Jew named Jochanaan, an ascetic preacher, had begun to offer people purification by bathing them in the waters of the Jordan River. The man's wild eloquence was drawing crowds of followers, including a young Jew named Yeshua bar Joseph, who would soon be gathering his own band of disciples. Jochanaan's message seems to have had political as well as spiritual overtones, or at least Herod thought so. And so the tetrarch arrested Jochanaan, took him as a prisoner to remote Machaerus, and there had him put to death. It should have been a quick assassination, a provincial despot's quiet purge of a minor local demagogue. Instead, the slaying of the man we know as John the Baptist unleashed forces of incalculable power.

The incident receives brief mention in the book called *Jewish Antiquities*, written by the Roman Jewish historian Flavius Josephus in the 90s, some sixty years after the events he describes. Josephus also mentions Herod's step-daughter Salomé, a perfectly proper princess who eventually reigned as queen of Armenia. Not a whisper of scandal attaches to her name, although her mother, Herodias, had excited gossip—and the Baptist's vocal disapproval—when she married Herod Antipas after divorcing his brother. Two other early accounts of the Baptist's death, however, pin blame for his beheading on the daughter Herodias had borne with her first husband.* The more detailed version of the story comes from the Gospel of Mark, paralleled in briefer form by the Gospel of Matthew:

And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee;

And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever



Scott Suchman

The cast of Yaël Farber's production of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*

thou wilt, and I will give it thee.

And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom.

And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist.

And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist.

And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.

And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison,

and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother.

But then something extraordinary happened. The followers of the Baptist gathered up his body, buried it, and brought the news back from Machaerus to Galilee, to that Yeshua bar Joseph who had also been bathed by Jochanaan in the River Jordan. Mark continues:

And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.

And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.

And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him.

And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things...

And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.

And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.

And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all.

And they did all eat, and were filled.

And they took up twelve baskets

full of the fragments, and of the fishes.

And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.

In Mark's telling and Matthew's, these two events, the slaying of John the Baptist and the miracle of the loaves and fishes, are integral parts of a single story. Not only did the lost sheep of John the Baptist find their Good Shepherd—this is the outcome that Mark and Matthew both mean to emphasize—but also, from Machaerus to Galilee, the death of the Baptist lit the spark of revolution, just as Herod had feared. In the year 39, the tetrarch lost his realm and was banished to Gaul by the emperor Caligula. Josephus declares that Herod Antipas traced his misfortunes straight back to the fact that he had murdered a righteous man.

Then, in 66, the whole of Judaea revolted against the Romans, leading to seven years of brutal war that ended—at least temporarily—with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the mass suicide at the fortress of Masada, and the demolition of Machaerus. By that time, however, the influence of the two men from Galilee had penetrated to the heart of Rome itself. In 64, after a devastating fire had swept the city, the emperor Nero, in the words of the historian Tacitus,

fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.

Pontius Pilate had no better success with his policy of repression than Herod Antipas. He was forced to retire from Judaea in 37, two years before Herod's disgrace.

It is this embattled Holy Land, with its merciless landscape, its perpetually treacherous political situation, its religious charge, and its profound connections to the present day, that provides the driving force for *Salomé*, a new production created by Yaël Farber for the Women's Voices Theater Festival in Washington, D.C. Her new vision could not be more welcome. The *Salomé* we know best, the fin-de-siècle temptress who haunted Gustave Flaubert, Gustave Moreau, Oscar Wilde, and Richard Strauss, came into being at the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth, in a steamy Freudian blend of sex and Orientalist fantasy that has become its own historical moment.

By the time he composed his one-act play in French for Sarah Bernhardt in a Paris hotel in 1891, Oscar Wilde had become tangled in his own web of sexuality, figuratively losing his head over young, blond Alfred Lord Douglas, who subsequently translated the original text of *Salomé* into an English strikingly devoid of Wilde's cor-

*Some manuscripts of Mark give the girl's name as Herodias.

uscating wit. With a hundred years of hindsight, Salomé's yearning to kiss Jokanaan's red mouth sounds suspiciously like the author's own yearning after the red mouth of "Bosie," a thrall to the love that dared not speak its name:

I love thee yet, Jokanaan, I love thee only.... I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor fruits can appease my desire. What shall I do now, Jokanaan? Neither the floods nor the great waters can quench my passion. I was a princess, and thou didst scorn me. I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire.... Ah! ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me, Jokanaan? If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me. Well I know that thou wouldst have loved me, and the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death. Love only should one consider.

But Oscar Wilde, though prone to folly, was no fool, and Farber weaves extracts of his symbol-laden drama into a script that also borrows from the gospels, Josephus, the Hebrew Bible, and the Mesopotamian sacred text that describes the descent of the goddess Inanna into the underworld. What dominates this gripping new production, however, is the physical feel of Judaea, a place made of rock, sand, and sun, where water is a precious rarity and human cruelty is more than a match for the ruthlessness of the land itself.

The stage has been stripped to the walls and painted black. Within this space, a ladder, a dozen chairs, sand, drapes, a sunken trough, lights, and a revolving stage are enough to create the Holy Land in our imaginations, from the banqueting room of Machaerus to the torture chamber where Salomé is interrogated by Pontius Pilate and his thugs, convinced that a young woman could never have plotted the death of the Baptist herself. A sudden shower of golden sand transports us to the desert, and when a parade of ordinary people wades through the onstage trough of water under the piercing gaze of Jokanaan (the remarkable Syrian actor Ramzi Choukair), we can gain some feel for what the strange, simple act of baptism must have meant on the edge of the desert. And throughout the action, two women singers, Lubana Al Quntar and Tamar Ilana, provide a hauntingly beautiful obbligato that keeps us securely in the Middle East.

Farber splits Salomé into two separate figures: the young princess (Nadine Malouf) and her older self, called the Nameless Woman (a fiercely gorgeous Olwen Fouéré). Ever since the murder of Jokanaan, she has been confined to a subterranean prison beneath the city of Jerusalem, just as the Baptist himself was once imprisoned in an underground cistern within the fortress of Machaerus. It is this Nameless Woman, the play's charismatic narrator, who spins out Salomé's dread tale in her resonant voice. Buried alive beneath the Temple Mount of Jerusalem, she has become the earth mother this harsh land would necessarily produce.

Herodias has dropped out of the story entirely, but Herod Antipas is present as a lecherous drunk (played with tipsy gusto by Ismael Kanater), exactly the kind of man who could offer a dancing girl half his kingdom—but why would he not, when ruling it meant trying to appease the Romans on one hand and the Jewish traditionalists on the other?

The play revolves around the idea that the murder of Jokanaan, John the Baptist, is an act with tremendous political consequences and that Salomé undertakes it because she, Jokanaan, and Herod all know that the Baptist's death will spur the Jews to rebel against the tyranny of Rome. T. Ryder Smith's cruelly practical Pontius Pilate is certainly

In this version of *Salomé*, the princess actually climbs into the cistern where Jokanaan is imprisoned, a vertiginous journey down a ladder so high and rickety that it drew gasps from the audience. Here, as the Nameless Woman recites the Babylonian Descent of Inanna, she sheds her garments and jewels as she enters seven successive gates, standing naked before being wrapped in a white dress. When the Baptist sees her, he bursts not into the abuse we hear in Wilde and Strauss, but into the tender poetry of the *Song of Songs*. Malouf is a beautiful woman, but with a strong, sturdy Eastern beauty; when Jokanaan says, "Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there

like an avenging Judith, and Jokanaan poses for a time in the posture of Caravaggio's great *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* in Malta. Susan Hilferty's scenic design is as deeply informed as Farber's script, while at the same time presenting tableaux of striking novelty.

The end of Salomé's story is, necessarily, brutal. It is inconceivable to Pontius Pilate that she could have acted alone, but after failing to torture the "truth" out of her, he can only condemn her, transformed into the Nameless Woman, to life imprisonment beneath the Temple Mount as the history she has helped to push forward continues to unfold above her head. Here Farber's Salomé passes definitively into the realm of myth; her real-life counterpart, the real Salomé, was bringing up her three sons in the region of Aleppo in present-day Syria, sons who would dissolve into the great melting pot of the Roman Empire. If there were daughters, too, we know nothing about them.

Washington, that most political of cities, was quick to recognize the ways in which this new retelling of Salomé's story might connect with current events, although, like any profound work of art, it does so in complex, suggestive ways rather than by offering simple parallels (the fact that Jokanaan speaks Arabic does not automatically make him a contemporary Palestinian). And what explains the persistence of Wilde's interpretation of Salomé's character, which has certainly outlived his play? Perhaps it is the fact that he adapted a much older story. The vision of Salomé the temptress seems to have arisen in twelfth-century Europe, when she features as a voluptuous dancer in Romanesque churches on either side of the Pyrenees, in Spain and southern France, a perennial symbol of lust.

In a similar vein, Renaissance painters from Filippo Lippi to Titian to Caravaggio return to her repeatedly, puzzling over the motives behind her gruesome request for the Baptist's head, focusing sometimes on her graceful body, sometimes on her enigmatic face, contrasting the girl's pleasing lines with the violent destruction of the Baptist's physical integrity. It is Caravaggio who brings the princess back into her weighty historical setting, imagining Salomé as a young woman who suddenly begins to grasp the full tragedy of what she has set into motion: for Caravaggio, this means the Baptist's experience of life and death, but also the whole Christian mystery of the suffering mortal who becomes a cosmic king, and John his forerunner.

Caravaggio painted the Baptist's death on a huge canvas for the private chapel of the Knights of Malta in Valletta, signing his own name in the prophet's spilled blood as he prepared to join the religious order established in the Baptist's name. In his felled prophet, hunched awkwardly on a barren pavement, we see both the glorious body of a man in his prime and the dreadful vulnerability of that body to ordinary human malevolence. On Malta's arid limestone plateau, it is this sad, compassionate painter whose vision of the last days of John the Baptist comes closest to envisioning the realities of the blasted rock fort of Machaerus, and also shares a deep bond with the stunning theatrical vision of this tragic story that Yaël Farber has granted us. □



Caravaggio: Salomé Receiving the Head of John the Baptist, 1607-1610

the kind of Roman to inspire rebellion: a procurator who levies taxes for aqueducts when he is not torturing rebels. The high priests of the Temple, meanwhile, are too worried about offending their two vengeful masters, God and Caesar, to mount a credible opposition to the Romans.

Above this incessant political and religious chatter, two eccentric voices proclaim visions that rise above the noise. They are the prophet Jokanaan, who wears a loincloth as if it were a fine robe and declaims in Arabic (most of it immediately translated by the Nameless Woman), and the huddled creature called Yeshua the Madman (Richard Saudek). Yeshua the Madman is not Jesus; he lived in Jerusalem a generation after Jesus, in the days preceding the Jewish Revolt of 66. He is dressed for this production like the homeless man who in real life stations himself outside the Shakespeare Theatre every day, wrapped in the same burlap shroud, surrounded by stuffed animals, rocking gently as he talks to himself. In the staged world of *Salomé*, Yeshua the Madman cries out the doom of Jerusalem just as Josephus says he did (and Yeshua was right on that account), but Farber's madman also tells the tale of the loaves and fishes from the Gospel of Mark. In Roman Judaea, everyone seems to be a prisoner, and everyone seems to be crazy except the wild-eyed prophet in the loincloth, who attracts Herod's stepdaughter as magnetically as he has attracted humble people.

hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men," we can believe the military imagery. Together in the Baptist's prison cell, they become the Adam and Eve of a new era. When Salomé climbs out of the cistern to face her stepfather's banquet, it is with a radiant sense of purpose.

Oscar Wilde was the first to call Salomé's dance for Herod the Dance of the Seven Veils, although his spare stage directions omit any information about what form that performance was supposed to take. Aubrey Beardsley would illustrate it, with Wilde's enthusiastic approval, as a "stomach dance," for belly dancing and various forms of "Oriental dance" were all the rage in the London of the 1890s. Turned into a striptease, the Dance of the Seven Veils provided an intense dramatic focus for Richard Strauss in his opera of 1905, and has presented a stiff challenge for many a talented soprano (Montserrat Caballé, mischievous as ever in her statuesque maturity, recalled scampering around the stage "before I got big").

The Seven Veils in Farber's *Salomé* are not articles of clothing but the floor-length drapes of Herod's banqueting hall, and when she begins to dance with them, in a spectacular turn, she brings to mind Samson pulling down the palace on his Philistine tormentors. When the Baptist's head falls at the end of the spectacle, the Nameless Woman stands by, sword and basin in hand,

Medical Research on Humans: Making It Ethical

Marcia Angell

The Nuremberg Code

issued by the Nuremberg tribunal in 1947; available at www.hhs.gov/ohrp/archive/nurcode.html

The Declaration of Helsinki

issued by the World Medical Association in 1964 and revised most recently in 2013; available at www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/b3/

The Common Rule

(Title 45, Part 46, Subpart A, Code of Federal Regulations)
issued by the US Department of Health and Human Services in 1991; available at www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html

The Ethics Police?

The Struggle to Make Human Research Safe
by Robert L. Klitzman.
Oxford University Press,
422 pp., \$35.00

In the first part of this review, I discussed principles and codes of ethics concerning human experimentation, including the Nuremberg Code and the Declaration of Helsinki.¹ But principles and codes are not the same as laws and regulations, even though they might inspire them. The first US statute dealing with the ethics of medical research on human subjects was enacted in 1962, as a reaction to the thalidomide tragedy of the late 1950s, in which pregnant women given thalidomide to alleviate morning sickness gave birth to infants with deformed or missing limbs.

Although the drug had not been approved for general use in the US, it was given as an experimental drug to many American women, and they were not told they were research subjects. The 1962 law mandated that human subjects be informed about the research and give consent. The National Institutes of Health also began to require that institutions that received NIH funding set up committees to review research on human subjects. In 1966, Henry Beecher, an anesthesiologist at the Massachusetts General Hospital, published an exposé of unethical studies that had appeared in medical journals.² But there was not much general attention to the subject until the 1972 public revelation of the “Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male.” When this research made front-page news in *The Washington Star* and *The New York Times*, it had been ongoing for forty years—straddling the Nazi era.

The Tuskegee study was launched by the US Public Health Service (the parent body of the NIH) in 1932. In it,

¹See “Medical Research: The Dangers to the Human Subjects,” *The New York Review*, November 19, 2015.

²Henry K. Beecher, “Ethics and Clinical Research,” *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Vol. 274, No. 24 (June 16, 1966).

399 poor African-American men with untreated syphilis were observed and compared with 201 men free of the disease to determine the natural history of syphilis. At the time the study began, syphilis was a major scourge. The only treatments were heavy metals, like arsenic or mercury, which were toxic and not very effective. The idea was to observe latent untreated syphilis, since there was a suspicion that men in the

liberations—was issued in 1978. As of 2014, fifteen federal departments and agencies have adopted a common set of regulations based on the Belmont Report to govern research on human subjects. Known as the Common Rule (it appears as Subpart A of Title 45, Part 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations), it applies to virtually all federally funded research on human subjects, and most institutions follow it even for

Ethics Police? The Struggle to Make Human Research Safe. “It is remarkable,” he writes,

that the question of how IRBs themselves actually work, make decisions, and view and understand these quandaries has received relatively little attention. Only a few studies of IRBs have been published, and these have focused on procedural and logistical issues.

He starts with an overview of the bare facts. There are now about four thousand IRBs in the US, most at non-profit research institutions, mainly academic medical centers (which consist of medical schools and teaching hospitals), and they usually meet monthly. But private, for-profit IRBs have also sprung up, which for a price review studies for pharmaceutical companies or other sponsors. And some academic IRBs have also started to charge industry sponsors for evaluating protocols—around \$2,500 for initial reviews, and \$500 for continuing reviews. Most boards review hundreds of studies a year, and many large medical centers have five or six IRBs. The Common Rule requires that IRBs have at least five members, at least one of whom is otherwise unaffiliated with the institution; and, in the words of the Common Rule, at least one “whose primary concerns are in scientific areas and at least one member whose primary concerns are in nonscientific areas.” Chairs are paid about a fifth of their academic or hospital salaries, and administrators are paid full-time.

After giving us the overview, Klitzman sets out to lift the curtain on the actual workings of these committees through extensive interviews with forty-six IRB members—twenty-eight chairs or cochairs, seven other members, ten administrators, and one IRB director—drawn from sixty randomly selected academic and nonprofit research institutions, thirty-four of which chose to participate. The results are sobering. The people interviewed are generally earnest and well-meaning, but they admit that they have almost no basis for their ethical decisions. In Klitzman’s words, “Remarkably, though PIs [principal investigators], to conduct studies, must regularly undergo testing about research ethics, no such requirements exist for IRB chairs, members or staff,” and “IRB members may not only be ‘self-taught’ in ethics, but use ‘gut feelings’ and the ‘sniff test,’ not careful ‘ethical analysis.’” Adding to the confusion, many multicenter studies require the approval of more than one IRB. One of the members interviewed confessed, “On a whole host of issues, we have absolutely no guidance, which contributes to very heterogeneous reactions of IRBs handling exactly the same studies.”

The underlying problem here is the failure of the Common Rule to provide



*Tony, a seven-year-old boy with artificial limbs, July 1963.
He was born without arms as a result of the drug thalidomide.*

later stages of the disease might actually fare better without treatment. The men were not informed about their disease or the purpose of the study. They were told only that they would receive free examinations and medical care.

The lack of informed consent was not unusual in those days. (There was no informed consent in the 1948 streptomycin trial, discussed in Part 1 of this review, either.) What was worse was the fact that the study continued even after penicillin was found to be effective against syphilis in the 1940s. In fact, during World War II, these men were exempted from the draft to prevent their being treated with penicillin while in the military. Later, researchers justified continuing the study by saying there would never be another chance to observe untreated syphilis. When the details of the study were revealed, there was widespread outrage, and the Nixon administration halted the study.

Suddenly, there was action. Congress passed the National Research Act of 1974, and regulations were issued that mandated the establishment of ethics committees, now called institutional review boards (IRBs), to review federally funded human research. The law also established a National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research to develop overarching principles. Its report—called the Belmont Report, named for the conference center where the commission began its de-

privately funded research. (Subparts B, C, and D apply to especially vulnerable groups—pregnant women, children, and prisoners.)

Look at how far we’ve come from the Nuremberg Code. The very existence of umbrella federal regulations, along with the rise of IRBs, demonstrates how much the locus of responsibility has shifted. Originally, responsibility was placed exclusively on the two parties directly involved—human subjects and researchers. According to the Nuremberg Code, subjects had absolute freedom either to consent or refuse to participate. And researchers had total responsibility for seeing that the research was conducted ethically. Now responsibility lies primarily with government and IRBs. Subjects have lost some of their freedom, since the requirement for informed consent is now conditional and can even be waived altogether. And researchers must abide by government regulations and IRB decisions. Whether this shift is a net gain is arguable, but it is certainly a major change.

For any given proposal, IRBs have the option of permitting the research to go forward, stopping it, or requiring revision. There is no mechanism for appealing their decisions. So what do we know about how these enormously powerful committees make their decisions? Next to nothing, according to Robert Klitzman in his book *The*

substantive ethical guidance. Instead it is almost entirely concerned with structure and process, such as the composition of IRBs, documentation (which is required to be absurdly comprehensive and detailed), and assurance of compliance. One IRB member, speaking of his institution's consent form, told Klitzman, "They have a 15-page consent form that is just silly in readability. You can tell the lawyers have been all over the form." But as to the ethical basis for decisions, in addition to informed consent, these are the only requirements: "Risks to subjects are minimized," and "Risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits, if any, to subjects, and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result." There is hardly any explanation of these almost offhand and vague requirements. The Common Rule also provides for waiving the requirement for informed consent if "the research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration," but says little about what that means. In short, IRBs are flying by the seat of their pants.

Here is what is *not* discussed in the Common Rule: Should a distinction be made between healthy volunteers and patients suffering from the medical condition under study? The latter often believe, despite what they may have been told, that researchers' primary aim is to treat them, not to study them. This misunderstanding is termed the "therapeutic misconception," and it is certainly understandable, especially since many researchers are also physicians. The patients naturally believe

that physicians will treat them according to their best judgment and alter the treatment based on whether it seems to be working. Should it be more strongly emphasized that they will be treated as a group, according to an unvarying protocol? Should patients in clinical trials be required to have an additional physician who has no connection with the trial?

In addition, the Common Rule says almost nothing about the special problems of research in developing countries, including whether it is ethical to use placebos in control groups instead of a known effective treatment, and whether consent can be truly voluntary in regions with autocratic governments that benefit from the money and prestige that come from hosting research sponsored by developed countries.³ One IRB member, speaking about the use of placebos in control groups, told Klitzman, "The solution is to do things elsewhere that wouldn't be considered ethical in this country. The FDA has no problem accepting those data from abroad." He went on to say, "The favorite place to do these now is either South America or Eastern Europe." Perhaps researchers should not even conduct research in developing countries unless the medical condition under study, like some tropical diseases, only occurs in these countries.

³Sonia Shah's book *The Body Hunters: Testing New Drugs on the World's Poorest Patients* (New Press, 2006) describes the Tuskegee syphilis study, as well as other unethical research, mainly in developing countries.

Another question that the Common Rule glosses over: Should the scientific importance of the research be considered in IRB decisions? Many studies of drugs similar to ones already on the market (called me-too drugs), and many post-marketing studies (additional research to try to find some edge over competitors) offer almost no benefit to society, as I will make clear later. As one IRB member told Klitzman, "Some kind of data is collected—usually very naturalistic data. But the *true purpose* of the study is to *prime the pump*—get the drug into clinical use—to *assist with marketing*" (Klitzman's italics). Another member said:

Bad science is bad ethics. A bad study that's not going to tell you anything—even if it doesn't expose people to risk, but only inconvenience, and takes time, just to facilitate marketing—doesn't make any sense to me.

In addition to the lack of ethical guidance, a serious problem faced by IRBs is their inherent conflict of interest, since they are usually established and work within the institutions where the research is conducted. Clinical research grants are a huge revenue stream for large medical centers. They cover much more than the direct costs of conducting the research, and they pay part of faculty researchers' salaries. According to Klitzman, "IRB members may hesitate to question a study too much because the industry sponsors might then simply 'pull out' and take the funding to another institution, thereby impeding their colleagues' careers." IRBs, he

says, "vary as to whether they see their primary clients as investigators, subjects, funders, or the institution"—if true, a damning fact. One IRB member told him, "Hospitals are told that they need IRB approval or won't get funded, and the hospital puts pressure on the IRB to approve it," sometimes by replacing the chair with someone less critical. When IRBs charge fees to review research proposals, the conflict is even starker. Another member said the fee

used to be collected as a discretionary fund, used as IRBs chose. Now, it's been expropriated by senior officials and absorbed as part of the whole school revenue stream, which has affected our turnaround time.

(I bet it was faster.) For-profit IRBs are just as conflicted, because their clients have a financial interest in the research.

Individual IRB members may also have conflicts of interest. The Common Rule states:

No IRB may have a member participate in the IRB's initial or continuing review of any project in which the member has a conflicting interest, except to provide information requested by the IRB.

But that provision seems to be honored in the breach. Klitzman writes that

despite the potential threats to integrity, 36 percent of IRB members have financial relationships with industry; 23 percent of those with a



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COI [conflict of interest] had never disclosed it to an IRB official; and 19.4 percent always nonetheless voted on the protocol.

Clitzman seems to like the people he interviewed; he approves of what they are trying to do, and wants to present them fairly. But he is also aware of the inconsistencies and confusion their comments reveal, and he clearly understands the implications. In his last two chapters, he offers some suggestions for reform, many of which make sense. But he does not call for an overhaul of the system, and I believe that is what is needed.

First, the Common Rule itself needs to be revised, because it is almost devoid of ethical content. Instead, it should deal with difficult substantive issues. These include the "therapeutic misconception" (patients' belief, as described earlier, that the researchers are there to provide them with individual care); the higher likelihood of harms than benefits because experimental treatments are usually no better, and often worse, than current treatments; the trade-off between individual benefits and benefits to science and society; whether the scientific merit of the research should be given weight (as called for in the Nuremberg Code); and whether to limit the move to conduct clinical trials in developing countries where there is almost certainly less oversight. None of these issues have easy answers, but the regulations simply don't address them seriously.

Second, since human subjects are drawn from the public, IRBs should represent the public. Currently, IRBs are the creatures of the research institutions whose work they are evaluating or of private companies hired by research sponsors or institutions conducting the research. They thus have every incentive to approve research projects. In academic institutions, for example, prolific faculty researchers with large research grants are a major source of revenue, and IRBs are naturally reluctant to oppose these academic stars. The solution is for IRBs to be regional public entities, entirely independent of research institutions and private sponsors. They could be established by the Department of Health and Human Services or by another governmental body, but it is essential that the protection of human subjects be seen as a public obligation, and that IRBs represent the public directly, not researchers or industry.

Third, the informed consent process should be changed to include evidence that the information is relevant and understood. It would be a simple matter to film the conversation between the researcher and the prospective subject (or his or her legal proxy). There would be two parts to the video: first, the researcher would provide the essential information, and second, the prospective human subject would be asked to repeat his or her understanding of what was just said.

A signature on a written document could also be obtained, but the real quality of the consent—that is, whether it was truly informed and comprehended (which is not the same)—would be on video. As it now stands, the term "informed consent" is virtually meaningless. In fact, the word "consent" has

become a transitive verb, as in "consent the patient," which means get his or her signature on a legal document. Often the job is not considered a high priority for the researcher, but left to junior staff. That should change; informing prospective human subjects should be a two-way conversation involving the researchers themselves.

Fourth, research using human subjects should have a serious scientific purpose, as stipulated in the Nuremberg Code. Currently, many clinical trials are simply a means to sell prescription drugs of little or no medical value. Some background: before a prescription drug may be sold in the US, the drug company must sponsor clinical trials to show the FDA that the drug is reasonably safe and effective. But the new drug needn't be any better than drugs already on the

The relevant point here is that all of these commercial maneuvers required the use of human subjects for the clinical trials necessary to get FDA approval. People who agree to become research subjects because they believe they are contributing to important scientific knowledge would, I suspect, be disillusioned if they realized that they are contributing mainly to drug companies' bottom line. Moreover, trivial research is a huge diversion of resources—including human subjects—from important research on the causes, mechanisms, and treatment of disease.

Fifth, the Common Rule permits research of "minimal risk" to be reviewed quickly by only one or two members of the IRB, and that makes sense. But it should better define "minimal risk." When prospective human subjects



market to treat the same condition; in fact, in most cases, it only needs to be better than a placebo. Once the FDA approves the drug, no other company may sell the same drug for the same use during the life of its relevant patent.

But most drugs, according to the FDA itself, are probably no better than other drugs already on the market, and most are not even new drugs at all, but old ones modified just enough to get a new patent (me-too drugs). There are expanding classes of me-too drugs, such as statins to lower cholesterol (starting with Mevacor in 1987 and moving on to Zocor, Lipitor, Pravachol, and others), or SSRIs to treat depression (starting with Prozac in 1987 and moving on to Paxil, Zoloft, Celexa, and others). There is little evidence that one is better than others in the same class, since they are rarely tested head to head at equivalent doses. Me-too drugs are sometimes made by the same company when the first one is nearing the end of its patent life (AstraZeneca replaced its best-selling Prilosec with the virtually identical Nexium). Sometimes an old drug is tested in clinical trials to treat a slightly different but related condition, so that the company can get a new patent and extend its market that way; for example, Eli Lilly marketed Prozac as Sarafem—same dose but higher price—for premenstrual symptoms.⁴

⁴For full descriptions of maneuvers to increase market share, see my book *The Truth About the Drug Companies: How They Deceive Us and What To Do About It* (Random House, 2004), especially Chapter 5.

have the medical condition under study, then they risk being denied the best treatment. That can be a big risk, and in general, research on sick people should almost never be considered minimal risk. In contrast, a great deal of research on healthy volunteers is of minimal risk. But the decision as to what is minimal should not be left to the researchers, who have an obvious conflict of interest. Social science research presents quite different risks, if any, from medical research. Much of it is essentially risk-free, and requires very quick approval. Some of it, however, has significant social or psychological risks, particularly in developing countries, and should be reviewed. It might be useful to create separate IRBs or standing IRB subcommittees to review social science research.

Despite all the problems and abuses, research on human subjects is absolutely necessary to advance our understanding of disease, and to prevent and treat illness better. People who volunteer to participate in such research perform a service for which the rest of us should be grateful. We must make every effort to protect human subjects from harm, and also to protect their autonomy and dignity. In addition, we should not misuse them in research that has no serious purpose. In one sense, human subjects can be considered an immensely valuable public resource not to be squandered. More important, they are human—sometimes our friends and neighbors—and setting up a system to protect them in every possible way is the right thing to do. □

—This is the second of two articles.

A Talent for the Low & High

Francine Prose

I Can Give You Anything But Love

by Gary Indiana.

Rizzoli Ex Libris, 239 pp., \$25.95

In an epilogue to *I Can Give You Anything But Love*, the writer, actor, and artist Gary Indiana explains his decision to avoid the familiar form of the conventional memoir:

At some point I began to prune away anything suggesting the sort of “triumph over adversity” theme that gongs through so much of the so-called memoir genre, paring away most evidence of my eventual career as a writer and artist—which has not, in any case, been an unmitigated triumph over adversity.... Eventually I let go of any pretense of documentary reality, and kept instead the evocation of things happening to a person for the first time, of being young and completely unprepared for life.

Indiana need not have worried about anyone mistaking his book for one of those heartening narratives that charts its author’s voyage through a stormy youth into the bright harbor of a glorious career. Unlike the memoirs that suggest we too can survive childhood trauma and live to tell the tale that, with luck, will become a best seller, *I Can Give You Anything But Love* is discursive, impressionistic, punctuated by incisive reflections on history and culture, witty evocations of period and place, mystifying forays into character assassination, and frank descriptions of sex.

Indiana, who has written novels, criticism, and plays, who has acted in films and in the theater, and whose video, shot mostly in a dilapidated prison on an island off the coast of Cuba, appeared in the 2014 Whitney Biennial, has created something like a collage composed of discrete events extracted from his past to illustrate what it’s like to be young and clueless. He never suggests we are getting a complete account of his life so far, or a work of trenchant self-analysis. Instead, we may feel that he has turned himself into a literary character: the Gary Indiana who was once young and a mess and is now older and steadier though by no means out of the woods. The voice we hear in these pages is intelligent, obsessive, amusing, self-mocking, extreme, and, on occasion, unpleasant. The author wants to tell us what has happened to him but also to show us the person those experiences produced: a proudly eccentric guy with a wide range of impressive, admirable, and less appealing traits.

The book’s structure more closely resembles the scattershot associations of memory and consciousness than an orderly chronology of personal history. Characters we meet early on return, pages later, greatly changed and diminished, the way the towering figures of our youth can seem, when we encounter them years afterward, to have shrunk to the size of ordinary beings. A chapter may begin in one location—New Hampshire, Boston, San Francisco—and end up in Los Angeles or Manhattan. Interspersed throughout are sections set in Havana, where Indiana



Dominique Nabokov

Gary Indiana, New York City, 2000; photograph by Dominique Nabokov

has lived, intermittently, for more than a decade, and which inspires some of the memoir’s most engaging passages:

This city was built for giant people with histrionic lives, the bygone lives portrayed in the Brazilian *telenovelas* everybody watches here; lives magnified by vertiginous ceilings and endless marble-floored rooms. Many not-well-off Cubans with lives of lesser grandeur inhabit the weather-beaten villas of vanished gangsters and deposed politicians with a casual dignity that isn’t entirely borrowed from a different time and a higher class. They have as much ancestral memorabilia as their former overlords, and often more impressive family histories, educational credentials, and professional attainments.

Though Indiana only briefly reports on his childhood (“I’m old enough to justify writing about my history, but too old to remember much of it. It’s one thing to make things up, but painting specifics that are only guesses feels like fraud”), he tells us just enough about his upbringing in New Hampshire to explain why it was unlikely to produce a paragon of self-confidence and stability:

Our private psychological mess... was never acknowledged for what it was: a swamp of wreckage heav-

ily tainted by alcohol. Reality was never discussed in the open, but brooded over endlessly in our separate mental jail cells. It was an unwritten law that any ugly circumstance was other people’s fault; we weren’t perfect, and didn’t claim to be, but we were a hell of a lot better than other people. Absolutely nothing supported this delusion, aside from a strict observance of three or four of the Ten Commandments that happened to coincide with the felony statutes.

In addition to enduring the stresses of daily life with “Drunk Daddy” and a grandmother who saw her grandson as a “saucy runt who shouldn’t have happened,” Indiana underwent a horrific attack at the age of eight or nine when two teenage swimming instructors blindfolded and gagged him, bound him with clothesline, and left him for hours on a raft in the middle of a lake. “Maybe that flipped me over to the dark side, as per Mumma’s preferred narrative. I tend to think I was pushed in that direction by things a lot closer to home.”

Connecting the sections of narrative are events and situations with recurrent motifs. The book’s title, with its play on the refrain of the well-known jazz standard, is not merely clever. It’s a highly compressed statement of a

central theme: Indiana’s propensity for entering into relationships in which there is sex without love, or love without sex, but which are too nuanced and complex to be classified as exclusively platonic or erotic. In Los Angeles, the affection and care he feels for Dane, a handsome exterminator with whom he is having a passionate affair, cannot be acknowledged for fear of alienating his lover. Meanwhile Indiana develops an obsessive crush on Don, a married, heterosexual actor

whose rimless glasses, chipped front tooth, and wild hair made him look like a sexy space alien. In fact, he later played a space alien, in a series of moderately successful, low-budget science fiction films. I pursued him with the recklessness peculiar to the young and clueless.... It was a purely willful, physical attraction, but I had fastened on Don as the person I wanted to love me back, imagining my desire could make this person I didn’t really know into the person I wanted him to be. Unless I am greatly mistaken, the man himself was actually much less interesting than the space alien he one day incarnated, and for that matter, less interesting than the man I was actually sleeping with. An unlimited obtusity governed my relationships with all sorts of people, particularly “romantic” manias that never found an appropriate object. Dane was easy, available for sex, and even, in his less-than-impressive way, devoted to me. Yet for that reason, I didn’t place much importance on the real relationship we had, and invested my emotions in one that I didn’t have.

A similar divide between the physical and the emotional characterizes Indiana’s romance, in Havana, with Mastiu, a barely literate deaf-mute whom he finds addictively attractive and touching, but with whom he can barely communicate. Indiana revels in Mastiu’s mysteriousness even as he despairs of understanding his circumstances, his character, or his intentions:

When he’s back in his pants he turns into a puppy. Perfect.

Puppies are adorable, but they don’t have fascinating inner lives. Before his awkwardly held pencil completes a word on the yellow paper he scratches out the erratic lettering and starts over. His difficulty printing revives my downward estimate of his IQ. I lose interest in his clumsy list of bodies of water where he fishes, a dreary penmanship exercise that doesn’t interest him, either. I can do fine without conversation. It’s these dutiful attempts at having one that begin to bore me.

The most significant, influential, and long-lasting of Indiana’s relationships is with a man he calls Ferd Eggan, whom he meets in San Francisco at a dark moment: 1969.

In the long, rancid afterglow of the summer of love, the Haight-Ashbury

had puddled into a gritty slum of boarded-up head shops and strung-out junkies, thuggish dealers, undercover cops in love beads and fight wigs. The hippie saturnalia had continued as a sinister parody of itself, featuring overdoses and rip-offs and sudden flashes of violence.

Together with his brittle, casually destructive wife Carol, the bisexual, charismatic Ferd spends his time shooting heroin, writing pornographic film scripts with titles such as *The Straight Banana*, and surrounding himself with a “posse” of “emotionally flattened hippies of both sexes.” Carol and Ferd are

fond of elaborate, cruel psychological games, like characters in Laclos. They attracted paramours and hangers-on like regents of a medieval court, or, to put it baldly, they operated with a good-cop-bad-cop teamwork, of a type I later observed in certain “power couples” of the 1980s art world, and elsewhere.

Enthralled by Ferd, Indiana has “rushed, furtive” sex with him a few times, and moves into the Broderick Street commune over which Ferd and Carol preside:

We lived allergic to daylight, when San Francisco felt like a graveyard under a bell jar. It had the muffled, overlit, queasy erotic gloom of *Vertigo*, with something in the grain of the daylight air a constant reminder that the drowsy dreamtime we occupied was sleepwalking to a bad end.

These premonitions of violence and doom will prove to have been justified. During Carol and Ferd’s “macabre masquerade” wedding, a ceremony performed by a minister from a satanic cult, a Hells Angel carries Indiana down to the basement of the Broderick Street house and rapes him, at knife-point, for several hours. Indiana suffers a breakdown and goes home to New England. There, recovering in a hospital, he is sexually assaulted again, this time by a male nurse:

Men were not supposed to be raped, and when it happened, nobody called it that. If you were male you were supposed to be immune to it, or strong and scrappy enough that nobody could really penetrate you without your cooperation....

Two rapes seemed more ridiculous than tragic. Perhaps this sounds glib. But prevailing opinion that what happened to me was not even possible forced me to suck it up and keep my mouth shut about it. As it happens, I reported the second rape, with the consequence that the psychiatrist assigned to me filed an affidavit swearing I had admitted fantasizing the whole thing, while the hospital administration quietly transferred the rapist to a job at a different facility.

Evident here (as in much of Indiana’s work) is his concern with power and powerlessness, justice and injustice. Sixty years after the Army-McCarthy

hearings, he recalls watching them on his grandmother’s black-and-white TV and notes that he has retained a “mental picture of Roy Cohn whispering in Joe McCarthy’s ear in the Senate hearing room.” (In his determination to omit the details of his literary career, Indiana neglects to mention that he wrote a play, *Roy Cohn/Jack Smith*, first produced at the Performing Garage in 1992.) In the past he has considered subjects including Arnold Schwarzenegger’s election as governor of California and, more recently, the radicalization of the Tsarnaev brothers. In *I Can Give You Anything But Love*, he addresses—tellingly, if tangentially—the political climate and the economic hardships of Cuba:

The CUC, a convertible peso, is a recent tweak of the island’s sad fortunes. Based on nothing but wishes, it’s worthless anywhere besides here. When I left in 2001, the standard currency was the US dollar, the sugar economy having collapsed along with the Soviet Union. That was what’s called the Special Period, which everyone remembers as utterly, horribly special.

Avoiding self-pity and polemic, he makes us understand, and sympathize with, the vulnerability of a young gay man without money, marketable professional skills, or helpful social connections. The book catalogs the jobs he takes in order to pay the rent on a series of dismal apartments: a stint at an overwhelmed, inadequate Legal Aid office, another at a movie theater concession stand.

Our offerings were undemandingly arty, slightly pretentious, domestic farces or dramas of middle-class marriage gone awry, or Italian sex comedies of the frou-frou type that featured the Antonioni-less Monica Vitti....

The cloying odors of stale candy and artificial butter were nauseating, but somehow stimulating too. In its own absurd way, working in a movie house wasn’t entirely unlike being in a movie or on stage as an extra.

The charm of Indiana’s cultural criticism has often derived from his gift for mixing references to high and popular culture, sometimes within one sentence, in order to illuminate or champion a book or film or painting whose meaning and worth may have eluded us. So this description of a holiday season “epiphany” at Walmart, from his essay on the artist Barbara Kruger, can persuade us to take another look at Kruger’s work:

Each department in Wal-Mart had its own Muzak system blaring Christmas carols, and each department manager, apparently, had decided to program a different medley of joyfully moronic carols. And, as you walked through Wal-Mart, these competing festive audios melted together into a completely dissonant, sour, even terrifying mélange, as if Stockhausen had decided to do a Christmas album, and

you know something, it was perfect, it was almost art, and no one in Wal-Mart seemed to notice they were being subtly encouraged to go home and commit suicide. This has something to do with Barbara Kruger’s work, I think. The ruin of certain smug and reassuring representations, the defacement of delusion, with just enough melody left in to seize your attention.

Scattered throughout the memoir, high-low juxtapositions reveal as much about Indiana’s sensibility—his ability to inhabit several worlds and speak multiple cultural dialects at once—as anything he tells us directly. The beachwear of the hustlers in Havana “magnifies their genitals to Godzilla scale, evoking commedia dell’arte phalluses.” A former lover resembles “Mellors in



Photograph by Gary Indiana from *I Can Give You Anything But Love*

a telenovela adaptation of *Lady Chatterley*.” The battered Hollywood sign in the hills above Los Angeles moves Indiana to reflect that its

melancholy decrepitude suggested a moonscape in daylight, painted by Caspar David Friedrich in collaboration with Walt Disney. I dragged one of the scrunched, shot-off panels to my car and jammed it into my car trunk.

Installed in my bedroom at the Bryson, the battered metal resembled a John Chamberlain sculpture with a Cy Twombly painting scratched into its facing. The people who came to my apartment were not the type to have those references, and probably wondered if I was as geeky as this pointless acquisition seemed to indicate.

Indiana’s style is so jaunty and conversational, his control of tone so deft that the book’s off-notes seem more jarring and discordant than they otherwise might. Among these is a rehearsal of the ennui Indiana suffered while interviewing David Lynch. (“He seemed spellbound by his own accomplishment, and had already decided what he was going to say about it.... His stories were humorless and boring. His smarmy air as he stirred his Postum was even creepier than his movie.”) Why are we being told this? A passage about Marilyn Monroe and Ernest Hemingway promises to be interesting, then devolves into a rant excoriating Hemingway as “a lousy writer. A phony writer. A writer whose books are a tissue of falsehoods and moronic clichés of masculinity.” Citing the problems with Hemingway’s work is like shooting fish in a barrel, but surely he deserves

some credit for having so profoundly influenced our literature, for having forever changed the way American speech—and American language—is rendered on the page.

More questionable (if only because it’s much longer) is an extended complaint about Susan Sontag. Even readers with no opinion at all about Sontag may find themselves wondering why Indiana spends seven pages describing how awful he thinks she was. There’s something interesting about the question of why, decades after their friendship ended, Sontag is the splinter that Indiana can’t seem to dislodge from under his skin. I would have liked to hear more about why certain wounds don’t heal, why we may find ourselves compulsively restaging arguments with the dead—and less about how he watched Sontag trash-talk her friends

and lovers the minute they left the room. Perhaps in his recreation of an earlier era, Indiana is summoning up the full force of the resentment he felt then.

It’s one strategy, I suppose, but it also reminds us that retrospect can have its value in sanding down the raw edges of unforgiven grievances that can no longer be redressed.

One of the book’s most vividly drawn characters is a drug dealer whom Indiana calls Benny:

Benny, who had suggestions of Rato Rizzo in his general affect as well as his physiognomy—a great limp mane of oily black hair, and a reedy frame he covered in stained pinstripes and pointed ankle boots—had taken up permanent residence in the darkest side of nighttime Los Angeles, where people on copious drugs were unfixed in space and time, their movements determined by random phone calls at all hours from strung-out customers and far-gone freaks throwing parties.... I went to lots of parties with Benny, each weirder than the next, in pitch-dark apartments where clumps of wild-eyed protoplasm huddled around amplifiers or tables streaked with coke or powdered meth. An enormous amount of imperious staring went on at these soirees, where any social interaction only served as a time filler, instantly dropped the second more drugs arrived....

Everything moved too quickly, or else with slothlike slowness, from one sinister tribal meeting to another, each a tableau of spiked hair and scads of cloudy syringes, bleary interiors sealed in a bubble of amber silence, often dominated by some garrulous vampire with an unimaginable backstory and a cruel mouth.

After Indiana buys drugs from him, Benny decides they should be friends: “I like the way your mind works,” he told me. These have always been ominous words, regardless of who says them. ‘We should hang out.’”

Despite how ominous Indiana finds the sentiment, the reader knows what Benny means. Not everyone will want to hang out with Gary Indiana. But for much of this lively memoir, one likes the way his mind works. □

How She Wants to Modify Muslims

Max Rodenbeck

Heretic:

Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now
by Ayaan Hirsi Ali.
Harper, 272 pp., \$27.99

Ayaan Hirsi Ali bluntly declares her intention in the introduction to her new book: “To make many people—not only Muslims but also Western apologists for Islam—uncomfortable.” Discomfort, alas, comes easily when the subject, as in the Somali-born author’s three previous books, happens to be the sorry state of Islam. It takes little effort to raise alarm when Muslim terrorists terrify so effectively, and when scarcely a day now passes without some horror committed in the name of their faith. Bombs and hijackings are passé; today’s jihadists prefer studio-quality, slow-motion bloodletting, or atavistic barbarities such as rape, idol-smashing, mass beheading, and the carting off of virgin sex slaves.

The opening device of *Heretic* underlines just how conditioned we have become to such depravities. Hirsi Ali presents a news flash describing a murderous terror attack, but strips it of such details as time and place and number of victims, leaving only the clues that the killers wore black and shouted “Allahu Akbar!” It takes little imagination to fill in the blanks. It is all too familiar, too believable: what she describes could happen in the office of a satirical magazine in Paris, or a boys’ school in Peshawar, or a village in northern Nigeria.

The device is effective, and Hirsi Ali quickly moves to score more points. For too long, she says, Muslims and Western liberals have argued that such atrocities, as well as the ideas and organizations behind them, are aberrations; that they represent a travesty of “true” Islam. Nonsense, she writes:

They are driven by a political ideology, an ideology embedded in Islam itself, in the holy book of the Qur'an as well as the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.... *Islam is not a religion of peace.*

Hirsi Ali has made similar and often stronger declarations before, receiving death threats from religious fanatics in response, as well as hostility from many secular critics:

I have been deemed to be a heretic, not just by Muslims—for whom I am already an apostate—but by some Western liberals as well, whose multicultural sensibilities are offended by such “insensitive” pronouncements.

Despite the familiar mix of provocative rhetoric and airbrushed autobiography, *Heretic* differs from her previous books. It is neither a retelling of Hirsi Ali’s own *hijra* into Western freedom nor another lengthy blast against the religion that she was raised in and that she abandoned. Hirsi Ali’s attitudes have shifted. Before, she had assumed there was no hope of moderating Islam; it was a creed that needed

to be “crushed,” as she once declared. Now, inspired as she says by the evident ferment among Muslims that gave rise to the Arab Spring, and by indications of a growing wave of dissent within the faith, she has come to believe that Islam can and indeed must be reformed.

To many Western readers, this is an attractive and seemingly obvious idea. After all, the other two Abrahamic faiths long ago undertook reformation, glossing away contrary bits of scripture, retiring inconvenient heavenly com-

Not altogether convincingly, Hirsi Ali makes use of this contrast in tone and intent to categorize the Muslims of today. In one camp, she says, stand the “Medina Muslims.” Ignoring the more universal and inclusive message of the Koran, these fanatics focus instead on the holy book’s fighting words, and selectively pick from later Islamic tradition those parts calling for harsh punishments and unending jihad. Hirsi Ali suggests that something like 3 percent of Muslims, or around 48 million peo-

It will be obvious, even to a layman unfamiliar with the intricacies of Islamic doctrine and practice, that this list represents a tall order. Hirsi Ali herself admits this, as well as the fact that hers is hardly the first voice to call for reform. Her more modest hope is to stimulate debate:

The biggest obstacle to change within the Muslim world is precisely its suppression of the sort of critical thinking I am attempting here.... I will consider this book a success if it helps to spark a serious discussion of these issues among Muslims themselves.

Perhaps it will, and that would be a good thing. The passion that Hirsi Ali brings to the argument is healthy, too. But there are several problems with her approach. These include such troubling aspects as her use of unsound terminology, a surprisingly shaky grasp of how Muslims actually practice their faith, and a questionable understanding of the history and political background not only of Islam, but of the world at large.

Take her three categories of Muslims, for instance. Hirsi Ali is probably quite correct to assert that while it is particularly noisy and violent, the jihadist “Medina” end of the Islamic spectrum is narrow and thinly populated compared to the much larger “Mecca” group. She is also right that the outspokenly critical Muslims are even less numerous. But surely the 1.5 billion “Mecca” Muslims do not all fit into a single hapless category. Like the members of any great religion, one might imagine they instead have a diversity of views, as designations that Muslims use for one another, such as, for example, Salafist, Sufi, Ismaili, Zaidi, Wahhabist, Gulenist, Jaafari, and Ibadi, would suggest.

Hirsi Ali herself seems a bit unsure of where all those middle Muslims belong. “Must all who question Islam end up either leaving the faith, as I did, or embracing violent jihad?” she asks.

I believe there is a third option. But it begins with the recognition that Islamic extremism is rooted in Islam itself. Understanding why that is so is the key to finding a third way: a way that allows for some other option between apostasy and atrocity.

I think it is fair to assume that quite a few Muslims, not only today but throughout the history of Islam, have found some “other option” without Hirsi Ali’s guidance. Rather than by abolishing or radically modifying the particular points of doctrine she so dislikes, they have done so just as believers in other religions have, by creatively reinterpreting their founding texts, or by quietly ignoring contentious parts. Others, such as Egypt’s Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Abdolkarim Soroush of Iran, or Abdelmajid Charfi of Tunisia, have critiqued more rigid interpretations of Islam in work based on a thorough knowledge of traditional Islamic



Ayaan Hirsi Ali at the Goldwater Institute, Phoenix, Arizona, December 2007

mands and punishments, and erecting a practical partition between religion and politics. Yes, the process was long and painful. But it has paid off pretty well for modern-day Christians and Jews, and indeed for the larger part of humanity that, knowingly or not, lives under the umbrella of Enlightenment.

ple, adhere to this form of Islam. Although she does not say so, this number is necessarily inexact since it includes not only the hyperviolent members of ISIS, al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and sister gangs but others who may hold similarly dim and blinkered views far from the front lines of jihad.

The vast majority of Muslims belong instead to Hirsi Ali’s “Mecca” category, a group she defines as devout worshipers who remain “loyal to the core creed” yet are “not inclined to practice violence.” Lastly there is a small category of what she terms “Modifying Muslims,” people who have come, like herself, “to realize that their religion must change if its followers are not to be condemned to an interminable cycle of political violence.” Hirsi Ali believes that Modifying Muslims can influence the Mecca majority and wean them from the temptations of the literalist, bigoted, and violent Medina creed. To help matters along she proposes a simple plan, picking five tenets of the faith that must be “reformed or discarded”:

- The infallible status of Muhammad and the literal understanding of the Koran
- Giving priority to the afterlife over the present day
- Sharia law “and the rest of Islamic jurisprudence”
- The empowerment of individuals to enforce such laws and customs
- Jihad.

scholarship and arguments that, unlike Hirsi Ali's, seek to place the problems of modern Islam in a historical setting.

Just as Hirsi Ali casually misrepresents Muslims, she misrepresents Islam. Falling into a trap that is sadly common among Western commentators, she repeatedly presents what in her own terms is the "Medina" version of the faith as somehow more authentic or valid than other interpretations. She takes, for example, the long-lapsed and historically rare practice of forced conversion—a practice jarringly revived only recently by ultra-extremist groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria or ISIS in Iraq—to be the norm rather than the exception. Yet historians now largely accept that far from being "extremely brutal," as Hirsi Ali asserts, the extraordinarily swift and sweeping early Muslim conquests were assisted by large numbers of willing "infidel" allies, who may have viewed Muslim rule as a relief from the warring Byzantine and Persian empires. Just seven years before the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in 637, Byzantine rulers had slaughtered all its Jewish inhabitants. Persian invaders had massacred all its Christians in 614. By contrast the Muslims permitted freedom of worship for everyone.

If Muslims had indeed made systematic the practice of forced conversion, as Hirsi Ali seems to think, how is it that they failed to convert the majority populations of countries they ruled for hundreds of years, such as India or Greece or Bulgaria? The contrast with, say, the expulsion of Muslims and Jews during the Spanish Reconquista is striking.

Hirsi Ali's mischaracterization extends from history to matters of belief and practice. "In its very name 'Islam' means submission," she writes. "You subsume yourself to an entire set of beliefs. The rules as set down are precise and exacting." Perhaps so, but the word "Islam," coming from the same root as the Arabic for "peace," also means "acceptance," "reconciliation," or "resignation" to the will of God. Hirsi Ali seems unaware, moreover, that the general uses of the terms "Islam" and "Islamic" are relatively modern, and indeed are to an extent adaptations of Western usages. As in the text of the Koran itself, for most of the faith's fifteen centuries its followers have far more often referred to themselves as *mu'mineen*—believers—than *muslimeen*.

Those rules that she describes, too, are neither as precise or exacting as Hirsi Ali would have us believe. She portrays Islamic law or sharia—which literally means the "way" or "path"—as "codifying" not only points of ritual but the organization of daily life, economics, and governance. In another passage we are told that sharia "states that women are considered naked if

any part of their body is showing except for their face and hands."

Sharia cannot "state" or "codify" anything. Far from being a rigid set of rules, Islamic law is an immense amalgam of texts and interpretations that has evolved along parallel paths within five major and numerous minor schools of law, all of them equally valid to their followers. Some parts of this body, such as laws regarding inheritance, vary little between rival schools. But in the absence of any universally accepted ruling authority and with political winds and exigencies constantly changing, legal opinions on most matters have tended to be fluid rather than fixed. So it is that while some clerics will agree with Hirsi Ali's definition of nakedness, others may insist on a full face veil, or perhaps—although this is

al-Qaeda or ISIS represents a deliberate challenge to traditional, patriarchal authority. It is a statement of zeal and determination, a form of advertising or propaganda designed not only to kill and frighten enemies, but to inspire new recruits into what are, in effect, as much death cults as religious movements.

Another peculiar contention of Hirsi Ali's is that "all over the Muslim world" women are stoned to death for adultery. In fact this hideously cruel punishment has rarely been recorded throughout Muslim history and never in most Muslim countries for at least the past several generations. In almost all cases where it has been applied in recent years, stoning has taken place in tribal or rebel areas beyond the control of central governments—the Tali-

Iraq, have portrayed themselves as "resistance" movements against dastardly Western domination.

Needless to say, the era of European colonization is long past. However much Islamists may still rail against "cultural invasion," or against the "artificial" Middle Eastern borders imposed by France and Britain, or against American military incursions and so on, the West cannot be blamed for many of the excesses of such groups. Hirsi Ali is quite correct that the jihadists have dredged the darker parts of Islam's own traditions to justify what are by any standard simply abominable crimes. She is also right that unthinking literalism blinds all too many Islamists to ethics, reason, and common sense.

It is a fact, too, that such strains of modern Islamism as Saudi Arabia's rigid Wahhabism developed autonomously and not in response to the West. They are manifestations of a cycle that has repeated throughout Islamic history, whereby puritan sects have periodically erupted from the hinterlands to purge and purify Muslim cities of supposed corruption.

Lost on Hirsi Ali, however, is the irony that such eruptions—and ISIS represents a new and particularly virulent one—are themselves products of a deeply felt need among Muslims for "reform." The fact is, as I have written in these pages, that Islam is now already, and indeed has been for some time, deep in the throes of a painful,

multifaceted reformation.* The current tribulations of the faith represent not a sudden new departure but a continuation of decades of churning controversy, of debate and strife.

This anguished process shares parallels with the experience of other Abrahamic religions. But there are important distinctions. One of them is the matter of timing: whereas Christian and Jewish reform evolved over centuries, in relatively organic and self-generated—albeit often bloody—fashion, the challenge to Islam of such concepts as empirical reasoning, the nation-state, the theory of evolution, and individualism arrived all in a heap and all too often at the point of a gun. Muslims have had less time to grapple with the revolutionary ideas of the Enlightenment, and have done so from a position of weakness rather than strength.

Another central difference from the Christian experience was that Islam has had to face the crucial question of what to do with religious law. Until the nineteenth century Muslims dominated virtually every society they lived in, with sharia acting as the backbone of legal systems from the East Indies to Morocco. Add to this the difference that there is no "church" in Islam—no fixed and widely recognized religious



A screen shot from a video released by ISIS in July 2015 showing young ISIS executioners parading past condemned Syrian government soldiers before killing them in front of a crowd of spectators in the amphitheater at Palmyra

unlikely—argue instead that the bikini is a practical garment for swimming. At times clerics have banned the drinking of coffee or the wearing of long sleeves, only to relent.

Hirsi Ali is similarly misguided regarding Islamic traditions. One of these that is "unique to Islam," she declares, "is a tradition of murderous martyrdom, in which the individual martyr simultaneously commits suicide and kills others for religious reasons." Despite the recent ghastly record that includes September 11 and ISIS's use of suicide fighters in its assaults on Iraqi cities, there is no such "tradition." Hirsi Ali herself notes that the first example of a Muslim suicide attack dates not to the distant past but to 1980, when desperate Iranian leaders adopted this tactic against the Muslim army of neighboring Iraq. As that example shows, most "martyrdom operations" have been carried out for political, not religious reasons or, as was the case with Japan's kamikazes and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka's 1983–2009 civil war, as a last-ditch weapon of the weak against the strong.

In fact the four main schools of Sunni jurisprudence—including arch-conservative Saudi clerics—all concur that suicide is a serious sin. Some individual clerics have condoned its use in war by invoking arguments of necessity, not "tradition." More than an enactment of anything Islamic, the resort to suicide by groups such as

ban in Afghanistan, ISIS in Iraq, and Boko Haram in Nigeria being cases in point. Out of the world's forty-nine Muslim-majority states, six retain the punishment in deference to Islamic legal tradition, despite the fact that the Koran, unlike the Bible (Deuteronomy 22:24), does not mention it. Of these countries only Iran, which officially placed a moratorium on stoning in 2002 but still gives leeway to individual judges, has actually carried it out.

Perhaps one reason for Hirsi Ali's propensity for taking the actions and beliefs of Islam's outliers and misfits as somehow exemplary of the religion's true essence is her unwillingness to suggest any external motivations for their particular madness. These are not hard to find. The many forms of Islamism—a more accurate term than simply "Islam" for the often violent and angry version of the faith that is sadly fashionable today—emerged largely in response to European imperialism. This is not surprising when we consider that between 1800 and 1950 some nine out of ten Muslims happened to fall under aggressively imposed "infidel" rule. Small wonder that most modern Islamist political movements, from the Muslim Brotherhood founded in Egypt in 1928, to Lebanon's Shia militia-cum-party Hezbollah, to the Salafi-jihadist State of the Islamic Caliphate that is now beheading people in Syria and

*See my "Islam Confronts Its Demons," *The New York Review*, April 29, 2004.

hierarchy to explain doctrinal changes or to enforce them—and we begin to understand the difficulty of progressive reform.

All too often, “reform” movements in Islam have taken the guise of fundamentalist purges, with efforts to reimpose some ostensibly purer form of religious law tempting their propagators to violence. Yet most ordinary Muslims have found subtler paths, accommodating modern ways by diluting to one degree or another their adherence to doctrine, by creatively interpreting sharia, or by regarding the intent of the law as more important than the letter. Plenty of proud Muslims do not pray five times daily, or worry much about what “proper” Islamic dress is, or base their political opinions on what is good for the faith. They pick and choose what form of Islam to follow from across a very broad range of options.

Most Muslim countries, for their part, long ago recognized the utility of secular laws to supplement or even supersede sharia. To governments seeking to build states in a fast-paced, competitive, and increasingly complex world, traditional Islamic law came to be seen not as too rigid—as Hirsi Ali would have it—but rather as too unpredictable, too open to the vagaries of individual interpretation by judges with little knowledge of the world outside scripture.

Keen to “catch up” with Europe, the Ottoman Empire sharply restricted the role of sharia courts in the mid-nineteenth century, ending in the process most legal distinctions between Muslims and other subjects. Tossing out reams of accumulated Islamic jurisprudence in the matter, the Bey of Tunis summarily abolished slavery in 1846, two decades before the United States. In the early twentieth century Egypt adopted largely French and Turkey largely Swiss law codes. Among the few modern countries that continue to declare sharia the sole law of the land, Saudi Arabia nevertheless has since the 1960s used civil law to regulate commerce, as a matter of pragmatism.

Such evolutions remain tentative, incomplete, and contested. Turkey in recent decades has seen a backlash against the secularization imposed nearly a century ago by Kemal Atatürk. Egypt, for its part, has struggled repeatedly to arrive at a constitution that appears to give primacy to sharia while effectively confining religious law within the bounds of civil codes; its laws are today a messy tangle of sharia-based and secular rules. In an appeal to populism in Pakistan in the 1980s, the dictator Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq pursued a radical program to revive application of sharia, including severe punishments for such crimes as blasphemy; Pakistani governments in the decades since have tried to back away from some of its more controversial aspects.

Where courts are crowded and corrupt, which is all too often the case in poorer Muslim countries, sharia retains a strong pull as an imagined panacea, a fact reflected in opinion polls. And in places such as Somalia or Afghanistan where the central government has collapsed or lost legitimacy, Muslim societies have often reverted to laws based more explicitly on scripture, including extreme punishments such as cutting off the hand of a thief. Some Muslims

in minority communities, meanwhile, have turned in on themselves, creating what some describe as Islamic ghettos in places such as the suburbs of Paris, or Bradford and Birmingham in England.

The call by radicals and fundamentalists to create, geographically, a larger sacred space for Islam, where the sound application of God’s law ensures a sweeter afterlife for the faithful, remains potent. This was an important impetus for the 1947 partition of India and creation of Pakistan, an “Islamic” state that, like the Jewish state founded less than a year later, may have been conceived by secularists but carried a strong imaginative appeal for the religious. The notion of an exclusive sacred space also underlies the darker fantasies of a resurrected pan-Islamic Caliphate currently causing mayhem in the Fertile Crescent. To one degree or another the civil wars, insurrections, and bitterly polarized politics that afflict many Muslim countries today reflect the struggle between such essentially utopian Islamist visions and a contrary trend toward disenchantment and the desacralization of public space.

As Hirsi Ali points out, such utopian visions are reinforced by the traditional Muslim view of history as a prolonged fall from the brief moment of grace that prevailed in the earliest years of Islam. It is strengthened, too, by the Muslim tradition of viewing the Koran as the literal word of God, and of exalting the Prophet’s reported words and deeds as a fixed template for correct behavior. Hirsi Ali’s conclusion: “In those terms, it is only the Medina Muslims who can represent themselves as the agents of a Muslim Reformation.”

But here again she is not quite right. The argument for a purge or a return to basic principles represents, as we have seen, only one kind of reformation out of many that Muslims have proposed and continue to seek. One might argue that enlightened reform is as much a part of Islam as violent radicalism, if not more so. In the eighth and ninth centuries, the Mu’tazilite movement tried to introduce ideas of free will, reason, and a historical understanding of the Koran into Islam.

Their efforts were ultimately rejected. But later Muslim philosophers such as Avicenna and Averroës applied Aristotelian and Neoplatonic methods to Koranic exegesis, just as numerous contemporary Muslim scholars quietly apply modern forms of scholarship. Hirsi Ali presents such efforts as doomed projects, but it may be fairer to say that they have simply not yet borne full fruit.

The very shrillness of today’s zealots may reflect an underlying fear that conservative orthodoxies are under threat as never before, facing a growing backlash not so much from the outside world as from within the faith. It is noteworthy that thirty-five years of self-declared “Islamic” rule in Iran have fostered not greater religiosity but creeping secularization, with ever fewer people observing religious rites. The more recent excesses of Islamist terrorism and sectarian rivalry have accelerated a far wider wave of doubt. Muslims with such doubts will not need Hirsi Ali’s hectoring to feel “uncomfortable,” and to consider new approaches to their faith. □



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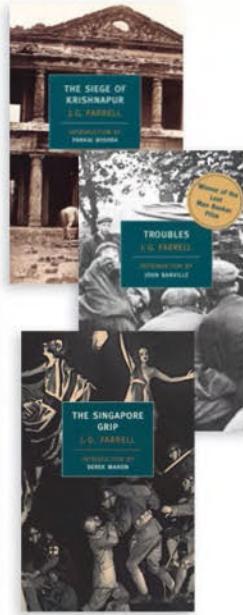
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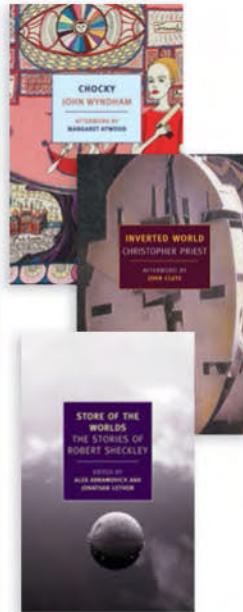
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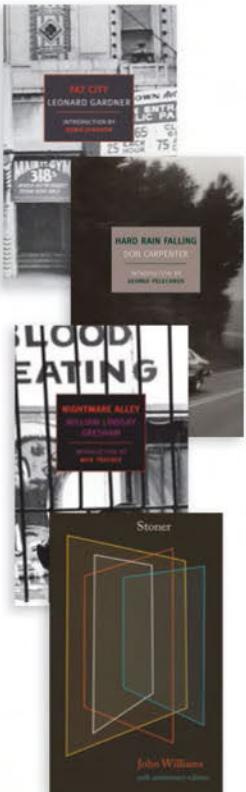
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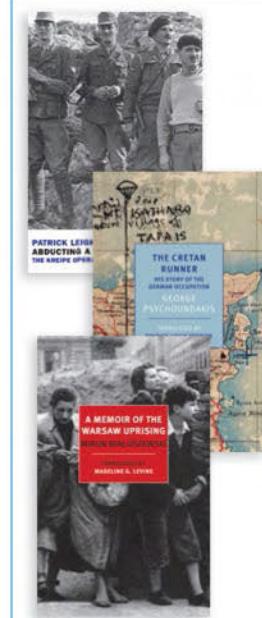
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Beethoven's Symphonies: The Revolutions

George B. Stauffer

**Beethoven's Symphonies:
An Artistic Vision**
by Lewis Lockwood.
Norton, 285 pp., \$29.95

The classical music world has been saturated lately with stories about the impending demise of the orchestra and the repertory it plays. Dwindling audiences and rising costs have forced American orchestras to cut personnel, shorten concert seasons, and even cross over to the "dark side" and play popular works unthinkable a decade or two ago (as I write I see that the Louisville Orchestra is scheduled to present a program of music by Led Zeppelin in November). When the Philadelphia Orchestra, the finely tuned instrument of Leopold Stokowski and Eugene Ormandy, is forced to file for bankruptcy, has the time come to declare Beethoven dead and buried and consign his symphonies to eternal rest?

A tale related recently by the critic Norman Lebrecht suggests that it has not. Several years ago, Lebrecht reports, the BBC decided to make the complete Beethoven symphonies available to its listeners as free downloads for a week.¹ At the launch, expectations were not high, since by all accounts interest in the works had greatly declined. In addition, the performing group was the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Gianandrea Noseda—respectable musicians, to be sure, but not a star ensemble such as Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic. The project was given only moderate priority, and the producers anticipated several thousand downloads.

However, much to everyone's astonishment, when the totals were counted at the end of the week they came to 1.4 million downloads of the symphonies. Forty percent of the listeners were from the United Kingdom and the United States—predictable BBC audiences. But the remaining 60 percent came from other countries, including Vietnam, Thailand, and Taiwan. Equally surprising was the fact that almost twice as many listeners chose Beethoven's First and Second Symphonies over the Third Symphony, the mighty and popular "Eroica," suggesting that the participants were new to the repertory altogether.

Thus there may be an audience, after all, for the nine Beethoven symphonies, and appearing just in time to enlighten it is Lewis Lockwood's absorbing new study of the works, which makes the case that this music is about a lot more than the notes on the page. The author of the distinguished biography *Beethoven: The Music and the Life* (a 2003 Pulitzer Prize finalist) and *Beethoven's "Eroica" Sketchbook: A Critical Edition* (2013, with Alan Gosman), Lockwood has been involved with Beethoven research for more than forty years, carrying out his work first at Princeton and then, from 1980 onward, at Harvard, where he is Fanny Peabody Professor of Music Emeritus.

¹Norman Lebrecht, *The Life and Death of Classical Music* (Anchor, 2007), pp. 139–140.



Max Klinger with his statue of Beethoven, Leipzig, circa 1902

He is one of the last stalwart defenders of source studies—the evaluation of the music through the examination of the composer's original manuscripts. That approach yields remarkable insights in his new book.

There is no shortage of writings on the Beethoven symphonies. The list begins with Hector Berlioz's collected essays from the 1860s and continues with George Grove's classic study of 1884 and the lesser accounts of Jacques-Gabriel Prod'homme (1906), Karl Nef (1928), and Antony Hopkins (1981). Such respected writers as Ralph Vaughan Williams, Donald Francis Tovey, and Maynard Solomon have discussed the Ninth, and the great Austrian theorist Heinrich Schenker has contributed dense analyses of the Third, Fifth, and Ninth. From these and other studies, the broad outline of Beethoven's compositional approach to the symphony is well known.

Beethoven delayed writing a symphony until 1799–1800, when he was thirty years old and firmly established in Viennese circles as the successful composer of piano and chamber works. His first two symphonies, No. 1 in C Major, finished in 1800 and published as Opus 21 in 1801, and No. 2 in D Major, completed in 1802, were solid pieces in the traditional Viennese mold (though Lockwood makes a case for subtle innovations in No. 2). At that point Beethoven went through a se-

vere personal crisis as he realized that his loss of hearing, first sensed around 1796 when he was twenty-five, was irreversible and would probably get worse. In an anguished letter to his brothers, the famous Heiligenstadt Testament of 1802 (named after the town outside Vienna where he was staying), he lamented his fate and admitted that he had considered ending his life. But art held him back, he wrote, making it impossible for him to leave the world until he had brought forth all that he felt within himself. The letter remained unsent and was discovered after his death.

The result of this self-reflection and resolve was Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major of 1804, in which Beethoven broke with classical tradition and created a work of unprecedented scale and complexity. Called "Eroica" (Heroic) and dedicated "To the Memory of a Great Man" (originally Napoleon, until he crowned himself emperor and fell from Beethoven's favor), the work liberated the symphony from eighteenth-century conventions and drew listeners into an emotional realm of struggle, endurance, and triumph. From then onward Beethoven produced a series of highly individualistic symphonies, normally writing two together, one radical, one conservative. The tame Symphony No. 4 in B-flat Major provided a balance to the "Eroica" in 1806. Then, in 1808, Symphony No. 5 in C Minor complemented Symphony No. 6 in F Major ("Pastoral"). In 1812, Symphony No. 7

in A Minor appeared with Symphony No. 8 in F Major. Finally, after a hiatus of ten years and his descent into total deafness, came the monumental Symphony No. 9 in D Minor in 1824, the most radical of them all and the first symphonic work to incorporate solo voices and chorus.

Along the way Beethoven introduced a steady series of innovations, including disorienting syncopation and wrenching dissonance. ("Beethoven always sounds to me like the upsetting of bags of nails, with here and there an also dropped hammer," John Ruskin remarked.) He also used a cyclical format with recurring motifs unifying the entire work (the ubiquitous short-short-long rhythmic idea in the Fifth Symphony, for example). And he expanded the scherzo from three-part to five-part, transformed the coda into a second development section, and introduced a new multiplicity of themes in expositions and development sections.

If all this is apparent from past accounts, do we need another survey of the symphonies? Lockwood answers yes, because of the large amount of new research carried out in the last fifty years and the availability of sketch material that has remained undeciphered until recently. It is Lockwood's great gift to be able to assimilate the extensive literature and research on the symphonies and draw on it to write a clear, highly readable, up-to-date account, acknowledging past commentators while bringing to bear the observations of recent scholars and the mostly familiar remarks of Beethoven and his contemporaries.

Lockwood begins with an introduction on Beethoven's view of the symphony ("the triumph of this art") before devoting a chapter to each symphony, discussing specialized topics pertinent to the work in question. For the Sixth Symphony, for instance, his topics include "Beethoven and Nature," "Depiction and Representation," and "The 'Pastoral' Symphony as a Unified Artwork." He concludes with an epilogue describing the impact of Beethoven's symphonies on two very different events: the founding of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the 1880s and an orchestra performance by the inmates of the Łódź ghetto in Poland under the Nazi occupation in the early 1940s.

Two themes dominate Lockwood's survey: Beethoven's desire to move audiences emotionally with his symphonies and the importance of the composer's sketch materials for understanding the works.

The rapid growth of public concerts in the second half of the eighteenth century brought with it a middle-class audience that felt entitled to express its pleasure or displeasure with the music it heard. Unlike audiences today, these early listeners not only appeared to understand the conventions of the works they were hearing but also responded actively to specific musical gestures. Witness Mozart's report to his father of the audience reaction to his Symphony in D Major ("Paris"), K. 300a, in 1778:

I prayed to God that it might go well, for it is all to His greater honor and glory; and behold, the symphony began.... Just in the middle of the first Allegro there was a passage which I felt sure must please. The audience was quite carried away—and there was a tremendous burst of applause. But as I knew, when I wrote it, what effect it would surely produce, I had introduced the passage again at the close—when there were shouts of “Da capo!”

The Andante also found favor, but particularly the last Allegro, because, having observed that all last as well as first Allegros begin here with all the instruments playing together and generally in unison, I began mine with two violins only, piano for the first eight bars—followed instantly by a forte. The audience, as I expected, said “hush” at the soft beginning, and when they heard the forte, they began at once to clap their hands. I was so happy that as soon as the symphony was over, I went off to the Palais Royal, where I had a large ice and said the Rosary, as I had vowed to do.²

By today's standards, this was a very active audience response. But it was also an ephemeral response, and one suspects that the participants went out afterward and had a large ice, too.

Beethoven wanted something else. He sought to move the audience's soul, not just please it with musical effects. He wanted the symphony to become a cathartic listening experience and a force for change. Lockwood suggests that Beethoven's expanded vision of the symphony as an emotional agent evolved over several years, emerging with the hearing crisis of 1802 and bursting forth in full force in the “Eroica” of 1804. He believes that this symphonic aesthetic may have originated in Beethoven's exposure to the plays of Friedrich Schiller as a boy in Bonn, and he cites a description of Schiller's early work *The Robbers* at its premiere in Mannheim in 1782:

The theater was like a madhouse—rolling eyes, clenched fists, hoarse cries in the auditorium. Strangers fell sobbing into one another's arms, women on the point of fainting staggered towards the exit. There was a universal commotion as in chaos, out of which a new creation bursts forth.

The Robbers played in Bonn later that year, and while there is no record that the twelve-year-old Beethoven was in attendance, there is good evidence that he had some acquaintance with Schiller's works when he was young. As an adult he knew many passages of the plays by heart and quoted them in letters and conversation. Lockwood stresses that it was the ability, inspired by Schiller, to stir large audiences to emotional depths they had not experienced before that Beethoven desired in his symphonies and that separates them from the works of Haydn and Mo-

zart, which were aimed more toward entertainment than edification.

Beethoven toyed with the idea of setting Schiller's “Ode to Joy” as early as 1793 and returned to it several times before finally using it in the finale of the Ninth Symphony, almost thirty years later. The “Eroica,” with its heroic themes, harmonic and rhythmic conflicts, pathos-filled funeral march, and other dramatic elements, was the turning point, the moment when Beethoven moved from Mozart to Schiller as his model. In the Fifth Symphony Beethoven presented an abstract but palpable journey from trial (“fate knocking at the door”) to triumph, and in the Ninth Symphony he went farther still, expressing a utopian vision of universal brotherhood through Schiller's ode.

For audiences, hearing the Ninth in 1824 was a very different experience from hearing Mozart's “Paris” Symphony in 1778. A review of the Ninth's premiere commented:

The effect was indescribably great and magnificent, the jubilant applause from full hearts was enthusiastically given the lofty master, whose inexhaustible genius revealed a new world to us and unveiled never-heard, never-imagined magical secrets of the holy art.³

In Beethoven's hands, the symphony had become a source of quasi-religious revelation—a “holy art.” It is no surprise that Max Klinger's statue for the 1902 Beethoven Exhibition in Vienna featured the composer sitting mostly naked on a throne, like a Greek god.

Lockwood's second premise, the importance of Beethoven's sketches for understanding the symphonies, is even more central to the book. When composing, Beethoven relied on an extensive sketching process, using both large drafting albums in his study and smaller pocket sketchbooks on his daily walks. Many of these manuscripts survive, and they show that Beethoven worked on several projects simultaneously, and that most of his compositions underwent a long genesis, sometimes stretching over a period of years. Themes, passages, and movements were drafted and revised many times over, until Beethoven was satisfied that the final version achieved the precise effect he desired. The sketchbooks also contain a running commentary on the material, as the composer pondered to himself the music he was working on as well as ideas for pieces in the future.

The first hint of the “Pastoral” Symphony, for instance, occurred four years before its completion, in an idea for a “lustige Sinfonia” (joyous symphony) that appears directly after Beethoven's first sketches for a work in C minor that turned out to be the Fifth Symphony. The sketchbooks provide entry into Beethoven's private world, showing not only how he composed the symphonies and other pieces but also his intentions and hopes as he crafted and shaped the musical materials.

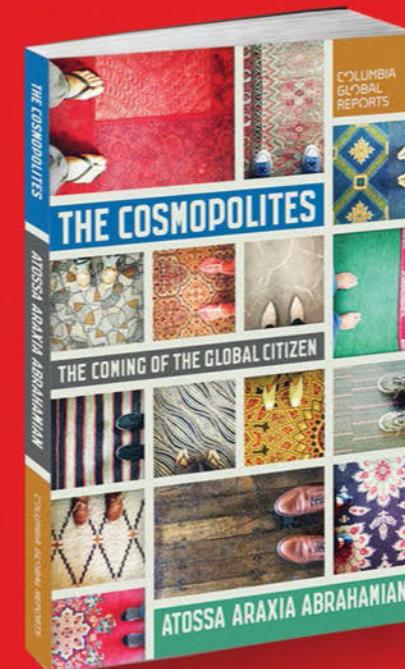
The importance of the sketchbooks was first demonstrated by the German

² Adapted from *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, edited by Emily Anderson (Norton, 1985; third edition), p. 558.

³ See Thomas Forrest Kelly, *First Nights: Five Musical Premieres* (Yale University Press, 2000), p. 175.

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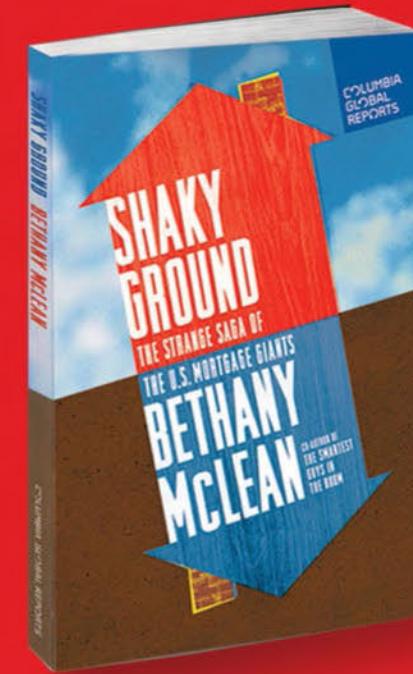
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musicologist and composer Gustav Nottebohm in a series of essays published in the 1870s and 1880s, and his findings were used by Grove a decade later in his survey of the symphonies. But whereas the sketch materials were peripheral to Grove's discussion, they are central for Lockwood, who uses them time and time again to trace the compositional background of the works and the development of important concepts. He even draws them into the descriptions of the music itself, pointing out that the last movement of the First Symphony begins "like a miniature sketch-process that builds up the first theme one fragment at a time" and that the mystical opening of the Ninth Symphony is "like the process of composition itself, from premonition to embodiment." This method of interpreting the works by evoking the composer's compositional process is Lockwood's most notable contribution to the literature on the symphonies.

The main conclusion that he draws, working from the sketch material, is that Beethoven was absorbed with symphonic composition throughout his life, not only completing the nine known pieces but sketching or considering ideas for almost two dozen other works. Most of these remained undeveloped, but taken together they demonstrate, in Lockwood's view, Beethoven's imagination "returning to the idea of the symphony across the span of his career, from early to late." This is the artistic vision in the book's title: an ongoing preoccupation with the symphony as the pinnacle of Western music, the means through which a composer expresses his greatest thoughts to the largest possible audience. In an appendix Lockwood presents a "provisional list" of the known symphonic sketches in chronological order. Nothing could make clearer the case for Beethoven's constant return to the symphony.

Other fascinating deductions from the sketches include the following:

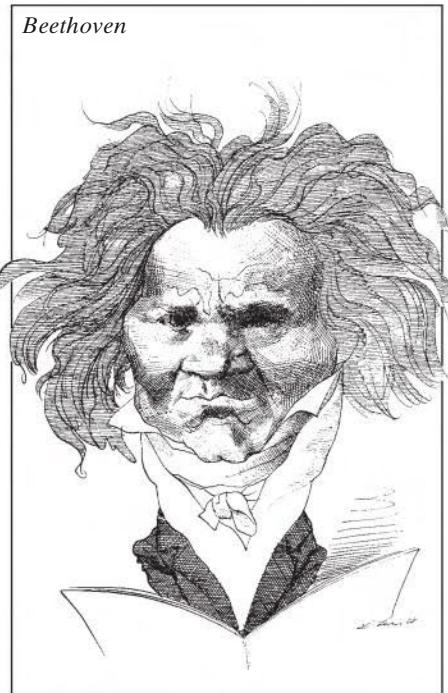
At an early point Beethoven considered a slow introduction for the opening of the "Eroica" Symphony but dropped it, possibly because it would have detracted from the second movement, the funeral march, which commemorates death in a symphony for the first time. It was the second movement, even more than the first, that moved the symphonic experience into the Romantic era.

In the case of the Fifth Symphony, Beethoven sketched movements 1 and 3 several years before turning to movements 2 and 4. He initially considered a traditional last movement in C minor before coming up with the idea of switching the mode from minor to major to produce the triumphant C-major finish. It is surprising that this central concept, seemingly the *raison d'être* of the work, occurred long after composition was underway.

The idea of a choral finale was a fundamental premise of the Ninth Symphony from the start, but Beethoven struggled with the problem of how to introduce the voices and how to set Schiller's ode. Beethoven was determined to convey the poem's message of universal brotherhood by creating a "people's hymn," a tune that would be attractive and rich in motifs but also easy to sing—a national anthem

of sorts taken to a higher level for a worldwide community. The sketch material shows that the "simple" melody, consisting of four-bar phrases, step-wise motion, and a one-octave range, was not easily achieved: Beethoven sketched almost twenty variations of the spontaneous-sounding tune before he was fully satisfied.

When composing the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven briefly considered a companion work, a symphony in "ancient modes." It was to feature a "Cantique Ecclesiastique," and the orchestral violins were to be increased tenfold in the last movement. (This begins to sound very much like Mahler's Eighth Symphony, the so-called "Symphony of a Thousand" of 1906–1907,



which uses the ancient Latin hymn *Veni creator spiritus* and calls for the addition of an antiphonal brass choir in the finale.) This symphony was never carried forth, though Beethoven did sketch ideas for another work, the so-called Tenth Symphony (completed in the 1980s, amid controversy, by Barry Cooper).

If Lockwood's survey has a drawback, it is the varied approach to analyzing each symphony. In some cases, he walks the reader through the work by using a nontechnical prose description, almost in the manner of nineteenth-century writers. In other instances, he presents structural charts accompanied by analytical commentary and music examples (mostly on a related website) that would hardly be understood by a general reader. At still other places, he turns to the sketch material as a basis for explaining what's happening musically.

Lockwood informs the reader in his introduction that he will treat the individual symphonies in different ways, but this occasionally leads to an inconsistency that can be frustrating. For instance, he presents helpful layout charts for the first eight symphonies (indicating the tempo, meter, and key of each movement), and he occasionally gives a detailed analytical outline of particular movements, such as the slow movement, "Scene by the Brook," of the "Pastoral" Symphony. But for the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven's largest and most complex piece, he gives neither. After reading the spirited discussion of the evolution of the "Ode to Joy" melody, I turned the page quickly,

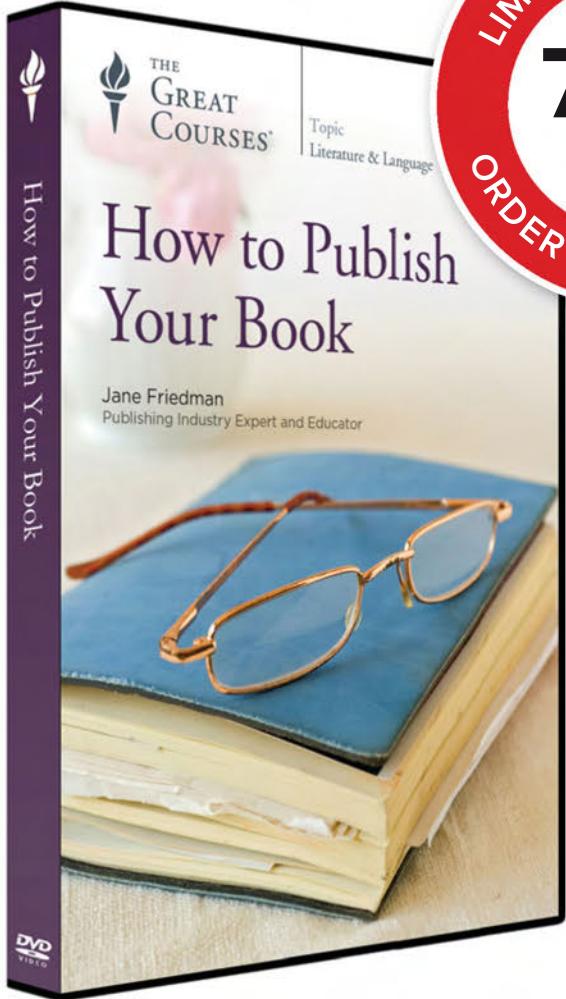
eager to see how Lockwood analyzed the famous finale, which from a formal standpoint can be viewed in a number of ways. What I found instead was the epilogue to the entire book.

It is ironic that Lockwood's survey demonstrating the great usefulness of source studies appears at a time when the future of such research seems in doubt. The origin of his work with the sketchbooks can be traced to the great outburst of American and British scholarship that accompanied the Beethoven centennial and sesquicentennial in the 1970s. One heard Beethoven's music at special festivals and celebrations almost every week during those years, and, through detailed analysis of the sketches and composition scores, Lockwood, Joseph Kerman at Berkeley, and Alan Tyson at Oxford led the quest to know just how the pieces were created. This work continued in the 1980s, but the initial enthusiasm has faded as musicology has turned to gender studies, reception history, and other specialties that focus more on psychological, sociological, and political matters than the music itself.

Lockwood limits mention of this scholarship to footnotes, for the most part, perhaps because it detracts from his fundamentally nineteenth-century view of Beethoven as a heroic figure presenting an ethical vision in his symphonies (Klinger's enthroned Beethoven). He touches just once on the work of Michael Broyles, who described Beethoven's intrusive use of C-sharp in the F-major finale of the Eighth Symphony as a comedy bordering on rage: "It is," Broyles is quoted saying, "rough, it is crude, it is calculating of the lowest sort." And Lockwood consigns the contributions of the feminist musicologist Susan McClary to a single mention at the back of the book. At several points he refers to the source work that remains to be done, pointing out that 80 percent of the symphonic sketch material still awaits transcription. Alas, "musicology in the twentieth century moved in other directions," he writes.

Whether anyone will continue the work of Lockwood and others on Beethoven's sources remains to be seen. Lockwood praises Erica Buerman's recent studies at the University of Manchester of Beethoven's concept sketches for multimovement compositions, and he mentions a few others, but the energy behind source investigation has mostly dissipated. Is Lockwood's volume a valedictory for this type of research? In Bach scholarship, the ambitious Bach Digital project of the University of Leipzig has made the autograph sources of Bach's music available to all online, at no cost, for scrutiny and appraisal. Unfortunately there is no similar attempt in Beethoven scholarship to provide universal access to the composer's manuscripts, sketches, and conversation books. Such availability would fit well with Beethoven's idealized view of universal cooperation and forward progress.

Meanwhile, Lewis Lockwood has served as an admirably articulate guide to the symphonies, drawing on a lifetime of scholarly investigation to explain the music, methods, and artistic vision of the composer. Like the BBC downloads, his book will surely inspire new interest in Beethoven's durable masterpieces. □



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In the Kingdom of Joyce Carol Oates

Phillip Lopate

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Joyce Carol Oates has published three books this year—a memoir, a serious novel, and a thriller. In fact, she has written so many books in so many genres that it is entirely possible to hold opposing views of her, as both underrated and overrated, depending on the sampling of her dozens of books you may choose to read.

Let's start with the memoir, *The Lost Landscape*, since I have always admired Oates's nonfiction: her book on boxing, her essays, and her reviews. In her nonfiction we see her at her most intellectually stimulating, cultivated, and professionally insightful. Besides, a memoir promises to bring us closer to its subject, and one is naturally curious to know more about this prodigy of literary production. How does one come to be "Joyce Carol Oates"?

Her memoir, she tells us, is not meant to be complete, but "an accounting of the ways in which my life (as a writer, but not solely as a writer) was shaped in early childhood, adolescence, and a little beyond." The landscape in the title was a rural area twenty miles from Buffalo, New York, where her parents lived in a farmhouse with her Hungarian grandparents. (Actually, they were stepparents to her mother, having taken her in when her own mother abandoned her.) Obligingly, for readers wanting to know the sources of her often violent imagination, she recounts incidents of family mayhem: one grandfather tried to kill his wife and ended up slaying himself, another was beaten to death with a poker in a barroom brawl.

It is something of a mystery to her that her own parents should have overcome such trouble to become figures of warm affection and rectitude. Central to her memoir is her "long romance of over sixty years with my beloved parents Carolina and Fred Oates." Her celebration of them seems to have been a crucial motive in undertaking the memoir:

Yet it seems to me, though my parents are not gods, that they are extraordinary people *morally*; not in their accomplishments perhaps, but in themselves; in their souls, one might say. It has been a riddle of my own adulthood, as I contemplate my parents: how, given their difficult backgrounds, their impoverished and violence-ridden early lives, did they become the people they are? So many of my writer-friends speak wryly of their parents, or are critical of them, or angry at them; their adult lives are presented as triumphs over the

Joyce Carol Oates



limitations of parents, and rarely as a consequence of their parents. By contrast, I feel utterly sentimental about my parents *whose love and support have so informed my life, and who have become, in my adulthood, my friends.* [italics hers]

She creates a strong portrait of her intelligent, resourceful father, Fred, who was forced to quit school before entering the ninth grade and work in a machine shop, Harrison Radiator, for forty years, meanwhile moonlighting as a sign painter. Though preferring cities to the country, he resigned himself to living on a farm owned by his wife's stepparents, even trying to raise pigs at one point. He found outlets for his vitality in playing the piano and church organ, getting a pilot's license, taking his daughter on adventurous flights, and watching boxing matches with her. Later, in retirement, he would take university classes in stained glass, painting, music, and English and American literature. Restless, opinionated, manly, and deeply ethical, he animates the book, much more so than Joyce's mother, who we see mainly as a saintly shadow, sewing clothes for her children and preparing meals.

Joyce herself, in the early chapters, is mostly an observer, not entirely equipped with the ability to take action. We catch luminously written glimpses

of her as a lonely child who yet revels in her aloneness; explores abandoned houses, whose haunted hints of past occupants excite her proto-novelist speculations; and wanders around late at night, spying on passing cars. During the day she strives to be an A student in a one-room schoolhouse, tries to get religion, and is beset by skepticism about her own smiling, appeasing presentation of self. Her Jewish grandmother introduces her to the local library and encourages her to read. (The tracing of her intellectual development, from Lewis Carroll and Poe to Hemingway, Baldwin, Nietzsche, and beyond, is a refreshing leitmotif, rare in today's memoirs.) It is only when she comes to know a neighbor girl, Helen, whose alcoholic father abuses his daughters and burns down their house, and whom Joyce torments by nosily questioning her about that tragedy while pretending to offer her friendship, that the narrator becomes a fully complicit, actively engaged participant in the tale.

Cruelty is, her readers know, a major preoccupation of Oates. Here we glimpse something of its derivation. "Young I had learned that there is really no way to placate the cruel except by escaping them.... You learned to rejoice that another, more vulnerable and more accessible victim might appear." She concludes that "cruelty is a kind of stupidity." But there is also a good deal of tenderness in the memoir, as exemplified by the insistence

that "perhaps there is no higher value, when we think of it, than kindness." The book is dedicated to her younger brother Fred Jr., but she does not attempt to characterize him, other than as the soul of kindness. She makes clear that her sympathies are with the poor and working-class, inspired by her socialist stepgrandfather, who died of work-related emphysema, and her union machinist father. Her Stakhanovite working habits? "From my parents, a love of being busy, *at work*." She writes drolly about her youthful attempts to earn money, selling beauty products door-to-door, making costume jewelry and lawn ornaments, babysitting, hawking Bartlett pears at a roadside stand, and cleaning houses. (She was fired from the last because, her employer told a mutual acquaintance, of "Joyce's attitude. She looked like she wanted to be somewhere else.")

As the title indicates, the memoir is preoccupied with loss. "We have forgotten most of our lives. All of our landscapes are soon lost in time" (italics hers). Oates apologizes for no longer remembering so many details. Just as well: her memoir is guided by feeling, and as such succeeds in being consistently moving:

Emotion is a sort of flash photography—if you feel something deeply, you are likely to remember it for a long time. But where emotion is not heightened, as in most of the hours of what we call our "daily" lives, memories fade like Polaroid pictures. The memoirist is one who has impulsively picked up a handful of very hot stones—and has to drop some, in order to keep hold of others.

Three magnificent chapters, or "hot stones," on the young Joyce are the high points of the memoir. The first tells the story of her best friend Cynthia Heike (an alias), who is well-to-do, bright, tortured, hates her body, and kills herself at eighteen. Every nuance of female friendship, affection, pity, envy, competition, betrayal, failed reassurance, and guilt is anatomized and dramatized here with a remarkable clarity and economy. The second chapter tells the heartbreaking story of her autistic younger sister Lynn, with whom Joyce is unable to establish any kind of connection, even eye contact: "Across this abyss, there is no possibility of contact." Caring for her sister swallows up her parents' lives, until she turns violent and attacks her mother, after which she is institutionalized. While still living at home she tears up Joyce's copy of Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*, an almost uncanny gesture demarcating the sisters' differences. Yet Joyce regards her as "a mirror-self, just subtly distorted. Sister-twin, separated by eighteen years" (italics hers). It is this mirroring sibling who contributes, finally, to Oates's wise perception and humility: "Yet to be proud of one's intelligence, talent, looks, or achievement has always seemed to me misguided; to betray a misunderstanding of the shake of the dice that grants us, or fails to grant us, our humanity."

The third chapter recounts the story of Joyce's graduate studies, at twenty-two, at the University of Wisconsin, a time in which she was overwhelmed with happiness and unhappiness. She fell in love with a fellow student, Raymond Smith, and married him, and at the same time, she became disenchanted with the sterility of the traditionalist English Department, and developed insomnia and tachycardia. After a nightmarish oral examination in which she was harried by the interrogator with petty, nitpicking questions, she was granted a master's but discouraged from going on to a Ph.D. This humiliating failure actually proved a godsend. Her husband Ray told her: "You didn't want a Ph.D. anyway. Now you can write."

Had the memoir ended here, it would have achieved a shapely elegance and finality. But Oates extends it for another seventy-odd pages with Parts II and III, catch-alls for scattered odds and ends about a film adaptation of one of her stories, a *Vogue* photo shoot, a poem in her mother's voice, lists, journal entries, and telephone transcriptions, as though she could not bear to let go of the memoir. Much of it consists of further attempts to evoke her parents: "I am determined to memorialize my father, my mother. But—how to begin?" she asks, as though she had not been doing just that for hundreds of pages.

These second thoughts are summed up in a pre-emptive afterward where her mistrust of the memoir form bursts through. It "has never been my intention to write anything that disturbs, offends, or betrays any person's privacy," she announces defensively, and recoils in horror at memoirists who describe the last illnesses of their parents: "Nothing is more offensive than an adult child exposing his or her elderly parents to the appalled fascination of strangers, even with the pretense of openness, honesty." Earlier, Oates had drawn the curtain on writing about her first husband, Ray, saying she simply couldn't dishonor their intimacy. Fair enough. She has been more than generous in revealing her own vulnerabilities, and every memoirist has the right to select what to disclose or not, and to avoid or smooth over subjects in order to protect others.

But her ambivalence about memoirs goes deeper: the form, she writes, distorts through retrospective hindsight, imposing a spurious narrative wholeness on life's fugitive fragments. "The most reliable memoirs," she writes,

you shift from the tense *I am* to *I was*, still more to *I had been* you are entering the realm of "creative recollection." My first memoir *A Widow's Story* (2011) was composed primarily of journal entries recording approximately four months following the hospital admission and the death of my husband Raymond Smith in February 2008.

Whether she likes it or not, *A Lost Landscape* is a much better book than *A Widow's Story*, in part because of that very distance, which allowed her to gain perspective on experience and to write sentences that are more graceful



Joyce Carol Oates with her father, Frederic Oates, 1943

and stunning than those recorded hastily in a diary under the shock of grief.

Oates states that she has previously resisted the memoir form "because I have never felt that my life could be nearly as interesting as what my imagination could make of another's life...." Early on, she found herself to be "under the spell of the Other, mesmerized by the prospect of mysterious lives that may surround me...." The irony is that Oates has in fact written a memoir that successfully renders "Joyce" as a vivid, extremely interesting, touching, likable character, and that, thanks to its brilliant chapters, deserves to take its place in the canon of American autobiographical writing.

The memoir ends with the assertion that "the most crucial quality of personality is sympathy." But sympathy does not guarantee access to a fictional character's interior life, which is one of the drawbacks of her novel *The Sacrifice*. This book is based rather closely on the Tawana Brawley case in 1987 and 1988, in which an African-

American fifteen-year-old was discovered in a trash bag, her body covered with feces and defaced by racial slurs. The girl claimed she had been raped by six men, including police officers, though many holes were found in her story by the press as well as the authorities, and a grand jury concluded that the story was concocted in order to evade punishment from a violent stepfather. At the time the incident was used by some African-American activists, led by Reverend Al Sharpton, to organize political protests.

In the present climate of concern for black victims at the hands of the police, Oates is brave in taking on this sub-

ject, and she has every right to inhabit African-American characters, as she has done frequently in the past. Her use of black English dialect in stream-of-consciousness or dialogue need not be offensive in itself. The problem is that too much energy has gone into mimicking colloquial speech patterns and not enough into exploring the inner lives of the characters. Oates's tendency here is to concentrate on their dread, fear, and rage, and they come off as generic. We never learn about the girl or her mother as complex individuals, with specific daily lives and idiosyncrasies. Rather generalized too, are the descriptions of the ghetto environment, bleak lists of squalor and deprivation.

Two chapters show the mental disintegration of both a rookie cop who shoots himself after a brief involvement in the case and an angry African-American man who guns down several policemen before dying in a hail of bullets. Both these interior monologues of mounting con-

fusion and despair are strongly written, but I'm not sure to what end, since we never see either character except in his moment of self-destruction.

The novel came alive, for me, with the introduction of a charismatic, opportunistic, nattily dressed preacher, Marus Mudrick, who is clearly modeled on Al Sharpton. Oates views Mudrick entirely from the outside, in a sardonically satiric spirit, but he has more vitality than the characters with whom she attempts to sympathize. In general the more educated supporting characters (a policewoman, a teacher, various attorneys) are more credible than her semiliterate African-Americans. It may be that Oates overvalues her ability to empathize with others, to shape-shift into everyone and everything (even an ill-advised appearance as a chicken in the memoir), while undervaluing her talent for writing about herself.

The Sacrifice is an attempt to base a work of fiction on a sensational tabloid story by following the process of the crime and its polarizing consequences in various parts of society. As such, it is reminiscent of Richard Price's fic-

tional method in *Freedomland* and *Lush Life*, though it lacks that writer's street smarts or his energy. The result is a patient, powerful rendering, highly readable and serious, yet ultimately strained and claustrophobic. The hopeful discovery Oates makes in her memoir about her own humbling graduate school experience—"We have the power to redefine ourselves, to heal our wounds"—is denied to the characters in *The Sacrifice*.

Carolina Oates

In *Jack of Spades*, her third publication of 2015, which is a psychological thriller, the narrator and main character, Andrew J. Rush, is a very successful mystery-suspense writer who has been called "the gentleman's Stephen King." With the profits from his sales of millions of books he supports a family in high style and gives money to local causes. But he also writes "cruder, more visceral, more frankly horrific" books under the pen name Jack of Spades; and gradually, in Jekyll and Hyde fashion, this side of him takes over the civic-minded, proper Rush. He starts plotting perfect crimes and actually killing those in his way.

Oates hasn't the slightest sympathy with this psychotic murderer and she doesn't go very far beneath the surface, as Jim Thompson for example did in his book *The Killer Inside Me* (1952). The book is written more in the breathlessly gothic style of Poe's "The Telltale Heart" or H.P. Lovecraft's tales. The author underlines her narrator's unreliability by punctuating his speech with exclamation marks. Another tipoff that he is self-deluded is his insistence over and over that "I am a good person! I am a person who loves his family, and I am a citizen who cares about his community." Would a professional mystery writer be so little aware of human flaws and moral ambiguities as to assert his own impeccable virtue?

Then again, the book is not meant to be realistic. Oates has fun with the world of mass-market publishing and the competitive envy of best-selling writers. Along the way she exposes Rush's loathsome condescension toward his wife, whose superior literary gifts he has exploited. He is not only a killer but a male chauvinist. His feminist English-major daughter unearths his beastliness through textual analysis of her father's books. We also learn that his lethal past extended back to boyhood. The hero/villain's panic, dread, and anarchic impulses intensify, until he gets his due. "To destroy evil we must destroy the being which evil inhabits, even if it is ourselves," he solemnly intones.

That a writer of Oates's stature and high ability should occupy herself with this nonsense suggests an imagination so fluent that no idea seems too far-fetched. In some ways, Oates may be deliberately parodying herself through the character of Rush, who declares: "For the simple truth is that *I love to write*, and am restless when I am not able to work at my desk at least ten hours a day."

In the vast, welcoming, permissive stretches of Oatesland, among its peaks and valleys of quality, *Jack of Spades* will find its humble place. Those who wish to explore that fascinating kingdom would do better to begin with her superlative memoir, *The Lost Landscape*. □

'The Mysteries of Paris'

Peter Brooks

On June 19, 1842, readers of the staid *Journal des Débats* discovered installment one of *The Mysteries of Paris* by Eugène Sue on the "ground floor" (the bottom quarter) of their daily newspaper's front page. Over the following months, the story unfolded in 150 breathless episodes, reaching its end only on October 15, 1843. It was certainly the runaway best seller of nineteenth-century France, possibly the greatest best seller of all time.

It's hard to estimate its audience, since each episode was read aloud, in village cafés throughout France, in workshops and offices. Diplomats were late to meetings, countesses were late to balls because they had to catch up on the latest episode. It was a truly national experience, magnetizing in the way celebrity trials have been in our time, maintained addictively from one installment to the next in a manner we now know through the television serial. The novel was such a success that it saved the respectable and somewhat musty *Journal des Débats* from looming bankruptcy. In fact, the emergence of the mass-circulation newspaper depended on the popular fiction it featured on page one: by radically reducing subscription prices (there were no single-issue sales at the time), introducing paid advertisements, and reaching out to a wider public through serial novels, the newspaper entered the modern era.

From the outset, the reader is plunged into the lowest depths of Paris-by-night, entering the *tapis-franc*, sinister low-life tavern on the Île de la Cité, the inner circle of Paris crime, prostitution, poverty, exploitation. Right away, we have a violent encounter between le Chourineur (Slasher, in the new Penguin Classics translation*), a former apprentice butcher turned killer, and la Goualeuse (Songbird), a prostitute with a pure heart, and then the providential arrival of Rodolphe, disguised aristocrat who moves with perfect ease in the lower depths. He's come to rescue la Goualeuse, alias Fleur-de-Marie, who's been tortured by her one-eyed guardian, la Chouette (the Owl), imprisoned, and sold by the Ogress. Slasher, Songbird, and Rodolphe then enter the tavern together, to trade stories (everyone in this novel has a story to tell), where they are served by Ogress, and spied on by the terrifyingly brutal arch-villain, le Maître d'Ecole (the Schoolmaster). And we are off, for sixteen months of lurid and breathless fare.

The novel of course triggered endless imitations and reworkings by others, in novels and stage melodramas, among them *The Mysteries of London*, *The Mysteries of Naples*, *The Mysteries of Lisbon*, and *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York*. Once the newspaper serialization was over, the novel was published in ten volumes, and sold edition after edition. *The Mysteries of Paris* made its author, Eugène Sue, more than a celebrity: he became a hero to working-class French and their political

leaders. Sue was elected to the National Assembly in 1850 after the revolution of 1848 created a short-lived republic, and then suffered the suppression and pulpiting of his final novel, *The Mysteries of the People*, and exile from France when Emperor Napoleon III grabbed power and silenced all opposition.

Sue before *The Mysteries of Paris* was the moderately successful author of seafaring tales and sentimental fiction. When he began *The Mysteries of Paris*, he had only a bare outline of the plot (any alert reader will guess that Rodolphe and Fleur-de-Marie will turn out to have some deep mysterious tie that calls them one to another) and he let one episode lead him to the next, under the imperative of closing each installment at a cliffhanging moment, followed by the sacramental "la suite à demain": continued tomorrow. Since newspaper subscriptions were renewed quarterly, a particularly dire moment had to be staged at the end of each quarter.

Sue began his exploration of low-life Paris largely from sensationalistic motives. Like his fellow novelist and rival Honoré de Balzac, who published the first serial novel, *La Vieille Fille*, in *La Presse* in 1836, he understood that the underworld was a colorful and complex place peopled with grotesquely interesting characters, all speaking a richly metaphorical slang. Balzac worked with the same material in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (*A Harlot High and Low*, as the current Penguin translation is awkwardly titled), a novel written, in part, to compete with Sue's success. Balzac never adapted to the constraints of the serial form as smoothly as Sue: he was too prolix, too much interested by the psychological intricacies of his characters. Balzac cuts deeper: his convict figure, Vautrin alias Jacques Collin alias the Reverend Carlos Herrera, for instance, becomes a complex study in protean imposture, sexuality, and what you might call the philosophy of the underworld.

Sue might fairly be accused of slumming, like his hero Rodolphe, though with less benevolent motives. But as he went on, particularly in creating Rigolette, the virtuous and cheerful seamstress whose earnings are scarcely sufficient to keep her from dire poverty and the slide into prostitution, and the unfortunate jewel-cutter Morel on whose family disaster after disaster accumulate, he began to deal with the realities of contemporary society.

This inflection of the novel really seems to have been the work of its readers, who wrote in enormous numbers to Sue, recording their intense reactions.

These letters (Sue kept them: you can read them today) altered the themes and the scope of *The Mysteries of Paris*. This bourgeois author (his father was a well-known doctor) began to discover that there was a true melodrama to the precarious existence of the working classes. The novelist could be sensationalistic and serious at the same time.

Many readers wanted to see Sue's characters as real. Some wrote him asking if he could get Rodolphe to help



Eugène Sue; portrait by François Gabriel Guillaume Lépaulle, 1837

them; some wanted to rescue Morel. But other letters reached Sue from readers who had tales that resembled those of Morel and Rigolette and Fleur-de-Marie, who recognized themselves in the excruciating circumstances Sue had created for his characters. Socialist reformers, too, began to bombard Sue with ideas and tracts, including serious sociological studies of the workers' condition—this was a moment of several remarkable proto-sociological inquiries into economic and social destitution in France, into prostitution, its causes and management, into the underside of nascent capitalist wealth and expansion.

Sue began responding to these readers by way of his novel, introducing such reformist schemes as a nationally organized pawnshop that would provide credit to the poor, public defenders for the accused, and a hospice for the children of convicts. A dialogue between Sue and reformers developed, and by the time the novel drew to its close, Sue was ready to proclaim himself a socialist. Though Marx and Engels would in *The Holy Family* ridicule the unscientific and utopian brand of socialism endorsed by Sue and those he inspired, and who in turn inspired him, for many *The Mysteries of Paris* was a gospel of humanitarianism.

The Grand Duke Rodolphe of Gerolstein (his identity is mostly hidden when he's out and about) travels in the underworld of Paris in search of opportunities to exercise his benevolence. He engages in "virtue policing" (a notion many readers thought should be instituted in the real world), rewarding those who deserve better than their fate, in a gesture of top-down charity. He finds his female counterpart in the society lady Clémence d'Harville, who

comes to help the prisoners at Saint-Lazare, where female thieves and prostitutes were locked up. This appears a bit condescending at first, but a contemporary reviewer of the novel caught the importance of what was going on:

Up till now, the novel, almost exclusively lordly, had kept proudly to the social summits, not deigning to look down.... This is the first time that it has penetrated so deeply into the miseries of the people; it is the first time that it has stirred up so profoundly the social slime, and that it has descended into these somber abysses where human suffering seems forever cast away from the pity of man and the justice of God.

Rarely has a novel had such an impact.

Sue creates a fabulous cast of characters, from the villainous to the virtuous, and he manages their entries and exits expertly, interweaving five or six different plotlines in order to maintain suspense and keep the reading experience one of high tension. His characters act out their psychic lives in the heightened words and gestures of melodrama. Writing in France, he can permit himself a measure of the erotic that was unavailable to English novelists such as Dickens or Wilkie Collins or Mary Elizabeth Braddon.

Rodolphe, for instance, makes use of the lusciously sexy creole Cecily to counter the malefactions of the evil and avid notary Jacques Ferrand, whom she arouses and frustrates to the point that he dies, literally, of unconsummated lust. Poetic justice takes such lurid but satisfying forms. La Louve, the fierce but loyal She-Wolf whom Fleur-de-Marie befriends in Saint-Lazare prison and who will be tamed and married off to a reformed poacher-become-gamekeeper, provides an address to female sexuality that more decorous novelists left untouched. The more delicate question of how Rodolphe can re-virginize Fleur-de-Marie, on the other hand, evokes all the ambivalences of male understandings of women and their bodies. Rodolphe proposes that, following her rehabilitation, she marry Prince Henri—but she understands that her degree of besmirchment can never

*This article will appear in different form as the foreword to *The Mysteries of Paris*, translated by Carolyn Betsky and Jonathan Loesberg, to be published by Penguin Classics in December. Copyright © 2015 by Peter Brooks.

be bleached out, and chooses instead to take the veil, and then tactfully to die of incurable moral sadness. Sue, you might say, earns his melodramatic presentation of reality by bringing to light emotions and issues so often repressed, in reality and in more self-censoring novels.

Sue's message was all the more im-

portant because the *Journal des Débats* was politically moderate and pro-government. He conveyed a quasi-socialist message in the years when the bourgeois monarchy of King Louis-Philippe was overseeing capitalist expansion, the creation of vast new wealth—and of the modern proletariat

(and preparing the revolution of 1848). He gave voice to truths about the social order that may have been dimly known but were not acknowledged. Well before Victor Hugo expressed his long-standing social concerns in *Les Misérables*, Sue asks us to pay attention. He draws us into his world so seductively

that we are forced to see what before lay hidden to the middle-class reader. Joseph Conrad famously wrote that the task of the novelist is “by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see.” Sue does that, while offering an addictive pleasure of reading. □

When Hawaii Was Ruled by Shark-Like Gods

Patrick Vinton Kirch

Paradise of the Pacific:

Approaching Hawai‘i

by Susanna Moore.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux,

303 pp., \$26.00

In mid-January 1778, HMS *Resolution* and *Discovery*, sailing on secret instructions from the Admiralty to search for the fabled Northwest Passage between the Atlantic and the Pacific via the Arctic, unexpectedly encountered a cluster of volcanic islands in the central North Pacific. Captain James Cook, already famous for his two previous circumnavigations of the globe, commanded the expedition. As the ships neared the larger island of Kaua‘i, several outrigger canoes approached; the first shouted exchanges between the ships' crews and the native paddlers confirmed that here was yet one more far-flung outpost of what Cook had come to call the “Polynesian Nation,” for the islanders spoke many of the same words that the English had learned in Tahiti, 2,560 miles to the south.

Cook tarried but a few days at Kaua‘i and nearby Ni‘ihau before continuing north, barely long enough for his sailors to infect the island women with venereal disease. Nine months later, wearying of the fruitless search for passage through the archipelago along the northwest coast of North America, Cook set course for the islands he had named after his patron, the Earl of Sandwich. His ships arrived off the much larger islands of Maui and Hawai‘i just as the islanders were about to begin the Makahiki, an annual four-month period sacred to Lono, deity of thunder, rain, and dryland cultivation. Cook himself was taken to be the living manifestation of Lono, or at least that idea was vigorously promoted by the Lono priests.

A combination of cultural misunderstandings and fateful coincidences led to Cook's death on the lava rocks at Kealakekua (“Path of the God”) Bay. The captain's body was defleshed, the British recovering only his hands and part of his thighs. By some native Hawaiian accounts Cook's bones were encased in a wickerwork casket in the shape of a human torso and head and for some years paraded annually around Hawai‘i Island during the Makahiki festival.

Cook lifted the veil that for centuries had kept this most isolated of archipelagoes in utter seclusion. Before the close of the eighteenth century the Sandwich Islands—fortuitously situated midway between the rich fur-hunting grounds of North America and the trading entrepôts of China—rapidly attracted traders and



The Hawaiian high chief Ka‘iana, who the nineteenth-century historian Abraham Fornander believed may have killed Captain James Cook; engraving after a drawing by John Webber, 1790

fortune-seeking entrepreneurs. The discovery of sandalwood (greatly prized by Chinese mandarins) in Hawai‘i around 1810 heightened the frenzy of capitalist exploitation, turning the islands into a “great caravansary,” as the fur trader Étienne Marchand put it. Protestant missionaries, arriving from New England in 1820, took advantage of the social and political upheaval following the death of the great unifying King Kamehameha in late 1819 to convert the “savages”; they were determined to cover tattooed native bodies with gingham dresses and frock coats and to stamp out all other manifestations of heathenism.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the native population was in perilous decline while increasing numbers of foreigners—*haole*—gained control of vast tracts of land that they converted to sugar cane plantations worked by imported Chinese and Japanese labor-

ers. The hereditary chiefs struggled to retain control of their island kingdom, which now had the form of a European constitutional monarchy. In 1893, a bloodless insurrection orchestrated by a mob of pro-American *haole* planters and businessmen overthrew Queen Lili‘uokalani. Five years later, a mere 120 years after Captain Cook stepped ashore at Waimea, Kaua‘i, the Hawaiian Islands were annexed as a territory of the United States.

The tumultuous history of Hawai‘i—from the first encounter of an island civilization with intruding explorers to its subjugation as a colonial outpost of America—has been told many times, from Ralph Kuykendall's magisterial *The Hawaiian Kingdom* (1938–1967) to Gavan Daws's irreverent *Shoal of Time* (1968). Susanna Moore, who grew up in Hawai‘i and has set some of her novels there, offers a new render-

ing of this island saga. Neither a professional historian nor an anthropologist, Moore combines a novelist's skill at individual characterization with an eye for ethnographic detail. *Paradise of the Pacific* (also the title of a magazine that promoted tourism in Hawai‘i from 1888 to 1966) brings a fresh perspective to what more than anything was a tragic clash between Native and Other.

Polynesian voyagers first arrived in Hawai‘i around AD 1000 (not in the sixth century, as Moore writes based on outdated scholarship), part of an extraordinary diaspora that led, at roughly the same time, to the settlement of other remote islands including New Zealand and Easter Island. For the next four centuries, a tenuous link between Hawai‘i and the ancestral homeland in central Polynesia (especially Tahiti) was maintained by occasional voyages led by priest-navigators whose names are still celebrated in Hawaiian traditions. Then, for reasons still unclear, the voyaging ceased. Hawai‘i became an isolated world unto itself, with only an increasingly distant memory of those lands beyond the horizon, collectively labeled “Kahiki” (the Hawaiian name for Tahiti).

By the early eighteenth century, a unique variant of Polynesian culture had emerged in this large and fertile archipelago. Supported by irrigation works and dryland field systems that yielded bountiful harvests of taro and sweet potato, augmented by fishponds and the husbandry of hogs and dogs for food, the indigenous population had swelled to more than half a million (the exact number at the time of Cook's visit is still debated). The great majority were commoners—farmers and fishermen—ruled over by a relatively small group of elites, called *ali‘i*. The commoners worked the land as part of their tributary obligations to the *ali‘i*, who in turn held large territorial estates (*ahupua‘a*) distributed (and frequently redistributed) by each island's paramount chief or king.

The *ali‘i* were obsessed with genealogy and lineage. The most exalted of the nine ranks of chiefs, the product (called *nī‘aupi‘o*) of incestuous unions between high-ranking brothers and sisters, were regarded as divine beings. As the nineteenth-century Hawaiian historian David Malo put it, “the people held the chiefs in great dread and looked upon them as gods.”¹ Metaphorically, the

¹David Malo, *Hawaiian Antiquities* (Bishop Museum Press, 1951), p. 61.

chiefs were regarded as sharks that travelled on the land, devouring all in sight.

Central to this hyperelaborated system of hereditary chiefship and divine kingship was the deeply rooted Polynesian concept of *tapu*, introduced into the English language as “taboo” thanks to the accounts of Captain Cook and other eighteenth-century voyagers. Susanna Moore zeroes in on *kapu*, the Hawaiian variant of *tapu*, as a key to understanding both the cloistered nature of Hawaiian society prior to 1778 and its subsequent dramatic unraveling.

The divinely descended Hawaiian *ali'i* were understood as intermediaries through which *mana*—the supernatural force or power enabling life, fertility, success, and efficacy of all kinds—flowed from the gods to men. As *kapu*, sacred beings, the *ali'i* had to be kept separate from polluting influences. Secluded in their *kapu* compounds, the highest-ranked *ali'i* often traveled at night to avoid being seen by commoners. Any commoners encountering the *ali'i* had to strip off their garments and lie prostrate on the ground until the entourage passed; to attempt a glance was to risk death.

The Hawaiian system of *kapu* had evolved far beyond anything elsewhere in Polynesia, pervading all aspects of daily life. Pigs, certain kinds of red fish (red was the sacred color), and bananas were *kapu* to women; indeed, the food of men and women had to be cooked in separate earth ovens while the two genders ate in separate houses. As Moore writes, “time itself could be placed under a *kapu*,” with nine days out of each lunar month consecrated to particular deities. Perhaps the most fearful *kapu* were those associated with the king’s war rituals, which were conducted on imposing stone temple platforms where human sacrifices were offered to the war god Kū. For a commoner, merely coughing near the warrior guard during such rituals could bring instant death.

Moore regards *kapu* as the invisible glue that held traditional Hawaiian society together, entwining *ali'i* and commoners in bonds of mutual obligation:

Kapu served to establish order, requiring men to respect the land, to honor the chiefs who were the literal representatives of the gods, and to serve the thousands of omnipresent big and little gods. In return, the gods endowed the land and sea with bountiful food, and protected people from danger (often the gods themselves).

The arrival of Captain Cook, first at Kaua‘i in 1778 and then for a longer stay at Hawai‘i in 1779, made the first inroads in what would become an increasing assault on the *kapu* system and on the social and political order of Hawaiian civilization. At Kealakekua Bay, Hawaiian women “came to the ships to offer themselves to the sailors in exchange for scissors, beads, iron, and mirrors.” Below decks on the *Resolution* and *Discovery*, the women ate forbidden pork and bananas with the sailors. Their husbands and brothers, eager to receive the gifts of iron adz blades and trinkets, did not punish them for breaking the *kapu*.

The five chaotic decades following Cook’s visits consume the greater

part of Moore’s account, in which she largely concentrates on the lives of two great *ali'i*—the warrior king Kamehameha and Ka‘ahumanu, the most favored (though not the most *kapu*) of his twenty-two wives. Other chiefs along with fur traders, sandalwood merchants, missionaries, and other *haole* enter and exit the story. But Moore lavishes the greatest attention upon Kamehameha and Ka‘ahumanu.

In his early twenties when Cook arrived, Kamehameha was by most accounts one of the warriors who took part in the captain’s slaying, defending his god-king Kalani‘ōpu‘u (also his father’s half-brother), whom Cook attempted

ing of the sacrifice of the rebel chief ‘Imakakoloa at the temple of Pakini, an event that foretold the coming conflict between Kamehameha and the heir apparent Kiwala‘ō. She writes that when Kiwala‘ō hesitated “to conduct the death ritual... Kamehameha leapt forward to kill the Puna [i.e., the rebel] chief.” In fact, ‘Imakakoloa had been killed two days earlier at the behest of Kalani‘ōpu‘u; his body had been slowly smoking over a fire of *kukui* nuts to prepare it for the sacrifice. It was during the ritual service, when Kiwala‘ō took hold of a cooked pig as an initial offering, that Kamehameha seized the opportunity to grasp the baked body

and cannon obtained through shrewd trading. Two captive *haole*, John Young and Isaac Davis, also trained Kamehameha’s warriors.

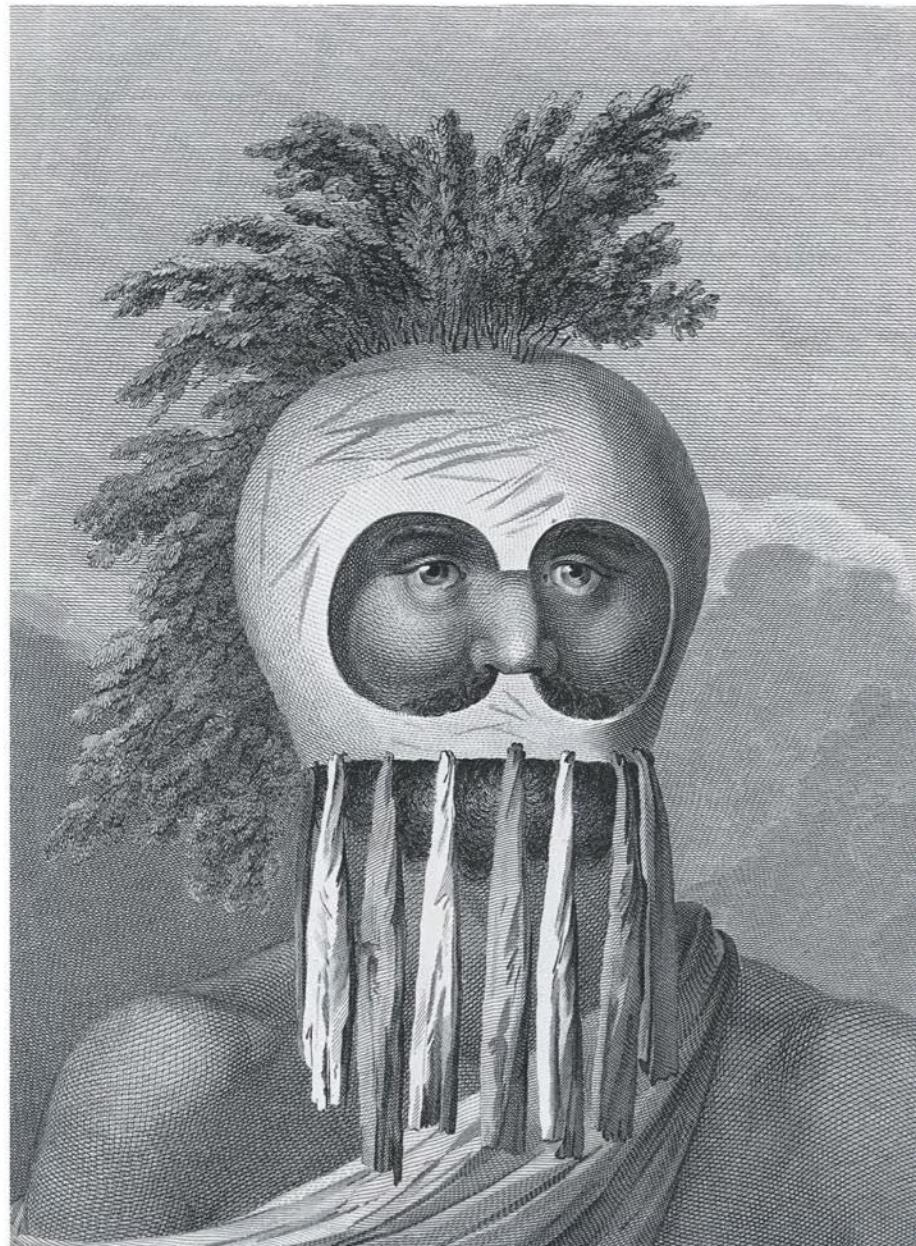
The beginning of the nineteenth century found Kamehameha established in the port village of Honolulu on O‘ahu Island, which increasingly became the archipelago’s center of commercial and political power. No longer needing to engage in war, Kamehameha quietly abandoned the rituals of human sacrifice—another rent in the *kapu* fabric.

Kamehameha had taken seventeen-year-old Ka‘ahumanu—granddaughter of the revered Maui king Kekaulike—as his third wife in 1785. Although of high rank, she was not considered sacred like Keōpūolani, the exalted chiefess who bore Kamehameha his royal heir and successor Liholiho (Kamehameha II). Indeed, Ka‘ahumanu produced no offspring; her power instead sprang from her influence over Kamehameha, with whom she shared a similar political cunning. Ka‘ahumanu, rather than his birth mother, watched over and raised young Liholiho. “As Liholiho’s guardian,” Moore writes, “the subtle Ka‘ahumanu was easily able to shape him to her liking, strengthening her already formidable position at the center of court.”

When Kamehameha eventually died of old age in Kona in 1819, Ka‘ahumanu was poised to bend the pliant Liholiho (then twenty-one years old) to her will. After a period of mourning in the northern part of the island, Liholiho returned to Kona to find Ka‘ahumanu waiting. “Holding Kamehameha’s favorite spear, she was dressed in the dead king’s feather cloak and war helmet, lest there be any lingering hope that Liholiho might rule the kingdom alone.” Ka‘ahumanu proclaimed that “we two shall share the rule of the land,” appointing herself to the newly created title of *kuhina nui*, or regent.

Ka‘ahumanu—who had for some years broken the *kapu* against women eating pork and shark meat—next engineered a remarkable act, inducing Liholiho to sit down at a feast and eat with the female *ali'i*. “Six months after the death of his father, and with the urging of his stepmother and guardian and the quiet persuasion of his mother, the king ate with the women, bringing to an end a thousand years of *kapu*.” This famous act—the ‘ai noa, or “free eating”—marked the end of the entire *kapu* system. Shortly thereafter, Ka‘ahumanu commanded that the temples be dismantled and the wooden idols of the gods burned. As Moore writes, “the fixed world of the Hawaiians, governed by a hereditary *ali'i* and priesthood with a distinctive system of *kapu*, suddenly became one of flux, if not chaos.”

While these events were taking place in Kona, the brig *Thaddeus* was en route there from Boston, carrying the First Company of Congregational missionaries, led by Hiram Bingham. Ka‘ahumanu, although she resisted conversion to Christianity for some years, quickly grasped the advantage of having the missionaries on her side. She became an ardent supporter of Bingham, in effect making him her new high priest and Christianity the state religion of her new regency. In 1826, Ka‘ahumanu, accompanied by Bingham, toured O‘ahu to dedicate



A Hawaiian warrior in a gourd helmet trimmed with ferns and pieces of cloth; engraving by Thomas Cook after a drawing by John Webber, 1779

to take hostage at Kealakekua. Of only intermediate rank, Kamehameha so impressed Kalani‘ōpu‘u that the aging king entrusted him with the care of the feared war god, Kūkāiliimoku (the “Kingdom Snatcher”). Moore does not tell us that when the king named his sacred son Kiwala‘ō as heir apparent—but simultaneously gave the care of the war god to Kamehameha—he in effect set the stage for a reenactment of a famous struggle for the Hawai‘i Island kingship that had been played out two-and-a-half centuries earlier. The story of how in the late sixteenth century ‘Umi-a-Līloa (like Kamehameha, given care of the war god) defeated his evil half-brother Hākau was a tradition known to everyone, *ali'i* and commoner alike. History, they would have assumed, was about to repeat itself.

Moore at times muddles critical historical details, missing cultural nuances, for example in her retell-

of ‘Imakakoloa, offering it up to the war god. As the priest chanted lengthy prayers, Kamehameha finally collapsed in exhaustion, lying with his limbs entwined with that of the corpse. Usurping the right of Kiwala‘ō to offer the rebel body to the god, Kamehameha left little doubt regarding his future intentions.

Following the death of Kalani‘ōpu‘u in 1782, Kamehameha lost no time in finding a pretext to engage in battle with Kiwala‘ō, who was slain by Kamehameha’s loyal war chief Ke‘eaumoku. It would take until 1795, however, for Kamehameha not only to gain complete control over Hawai‘i Island, but to extend his hegemony through a campaign of invasions of the islands of Maui, Moloka‘i, and finally O‘ahu. Kamehameha’s military success was assured by his increasing comprehension of the white man’s ways, which enabled him to equip his army with muskets

churches and impose the new Christian *kapu* of prohibitions against murder, adultery, alcohol, and other sins. Moore describes the counterclockwise direction of Ka'ahumanu's tour as "a reenactment of the traditional procession" of the king during the Makahiki. In fact, however, the Makahiki procession had always been a clockwise circuit; hence Ka'ahumanu's choice of proceeding counterclockwise was yet another symbol of her defiance of the old system of *kapu*.

For Moore, the abandonment of *kapu* and the old gods and the adoption of Christianity were pivotal to the transformation of Hawaiian society:

With the death of the gods, it became increasingly difficult if not impossible for the *ali'i* to justify claims of their own divinity. In abandoning the gods, the chiefs lost the source of their great power, their *mana*, and their ability to impose meaning, however questionable, on the customs of the land.

The bonds of *aloha*—of mutual love and respect—between the chiefs and the people were rapidly being loosened.

Ka'ahumanu died in 1832, attended by Hiram Bingham and other missionaries. The death of a high *ali'i* had always been a time of ritualized *kapu*-breaking. But now, according to Moore, "the sense of ill ease that had been growing in the kingdom grew stronger as people attempted to hold to the fast-disappearing ways of the past." Indeed, the young king Kaukeaoouli

(Kamehameha III) seized the opportunity to throw off the missionary yoke and try to reassert the old order, even mating publicly before the assembled chiefs with his sister Nāhi'ena'ena in the ancient act of creating a *nī'aupi'o* heir. Scandalized, the missionaries arranged to have the king taken to Maui for a period of indoctrination and reeducation.

After the death of Ka'ahumanu—upon whom so much detail is lavished in the first two thirds of her book—Moore rushes through the next six decades in Hawai'i's transformation in a mere ten pages. The Great Mahele, or division of lands between King Kamehameha III and his principal chiefs (leaving the commoners with only one percent of the land), the efforts of Alexander Liholihi (Kamehameha IV) and Queen Emma to realign the kingdom with Great Britain (and thus subvert the growing power of the American missionaries), the struggles for succession after the death of Kamehameha V (the last of his dynasty), and the long and quixotic reign of Kalākaua, the "Merry Monarch," are hurriedly passed over with little of the attention to detail or nuance that Moore devotes to Kamehameha or Ka'ahumanu, or even to the long-suffering missionary wife Lucy Thurston. It is as if—with the death of Ka'ahumanu—she lost much of her interest in the story.

Moore tells us that in 1893 the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani, the last of the Hawaiian monarchs, was in reaction to her intention to promulgate a new constitution "in which the rights of native Hawaiians would be protected." But a full appreciation of

Lili'uokalani's actions would require a recounting of how under the preceding reign of her brother Kalākaua, the king had been forced by his *haole* cabinet to accept the infamous 1887 "Bayonet Constitution" abrogating the rights of most Hawaiians and stripping the Hawaiian monarchy of much of its authority. It is also unfair and inaccurate to state, as Moore does, that the annexation of Hawai'i in 1898 by the United States occurred "with little resistance from the Hawaiians," especially in light of recent studies showing that more than half of the adult native Hawaiian population signed petitions opposing annexation.²

Although one wishes Moore had gone more thoroughly into the later stages of Hawai'i's transformation from an indigenous kingdom to a colonial territory, *Paradise of the Pacific* is nonetheless a real contribution to Hawaiian history, not the least for her intriguing thesis that the sundering of the *kapu* system offers the key to understanding the tragic breakdown of traditional Hawaiian society:

After the abolition of the gods and the complex system of ritual that accompanied them, as well as the end of warfare, there was not very much for the *ali'i* to do. They had yet to take an interest in government, or in a system in which influence and power were not dependent on rank and lineage.... With the

²See Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Duke University Press, 2004).

new Christian *kapu* imposed by the missionaries, the *ali'i* were even more adrift than they had been.

And yet Moore cautions against reading Hawaiian history solely as a saga of foreign interference and victimization of an indigenous people:

Although it has become useful for scholars and writers to blame the influence of foreigners, particularly the missionaries, for the near annihilation of the Hawaiian race, it is impossible to exempt the *ali'i* from hastening its decline. Putting aside the inexorability of historical determinism, it is too easy to fault foreigners for the dissolution and eventual collapse of the Hawaiian monarchy.

This is not a view that will gain Moore popularity with many contemporary native Hawaiian historians or scholars. It is, nonetheless, a reasonable assessment.³ The cultural structures of ambition and competition among chieftains that had evolved over the centuries and were encapsulated in the uniquely Hawaiian system of *kapu* surely amplified the effects of capitalism when this ultimately descended upon the islands. □

³The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins expressed a similar view: "Hawaiians too were authors of their history and not merely its victims." Sahlins, *Historical Ethnography*, Vol. 1 of Patrick V. Kirch and Marshall Sahlins, *Anahulu: The Anthropology of History in the Kingdom of Hawaii* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 215–216.

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In the Mountains of Mathematics

Jim Holt

Mathematics Without Apologies: Portrait of a Problematic Vocation
by Michael Harris.
Princeton University Press,
438 pp., \$29.95

“The science of pure mathematics... may claim to be the most original creation of the human spirit.” So declared the philosopher (and lapsed mathematician) Alfred North Whitehead. Strange, then, that the practitioners of this “science” still feel the need to justify their vocation—not to mention the funding that the rest of society grants them to pursue it. Note that Whitehead said “pure” mathematics. He wasn’t talking about the “applied” variety: the kind that is cultivated for its usefulness to the empirical sciences, or for commercial purposes. (The latter is sometimes disparagingly referred to as “industrial mathematics.”) “Pure” mathematics is indifferent to such concerns. Its deepest problems arise out of its own inward-looking mysteries.

From time to time, of course, research in pure mathematics does turn out to have applications. The theoretical goose lays a golden egg. It was to this potential for unexpectedly useful by-products that Abraham Flexner, the founder of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, called attention in a 1939 article in *Harper’s* titled “The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge.” But the “Golden Goose argument” (as historian Steven Shapin has dubbed it) is not one that much appeals to pure mathematicians. The British mathematician G. H. Hardy, for one, was positively contemptuous of the idea that “real” mathematics should be expected to have any practical importance.

In his 1940 book *A Mathematician’s Apology*—justly hailed by David Foster Wallace as “the most lucid English prose work ever on math”—Hardy argued that the point of mathematics was the same as the point of art: the creation of intrinsic beauty. He reveled in what he presumed to be the utter uselessness of his own specialty, the theory of numbers. No doubt Hardy, who died in 1947, would be distressed to learn that his “pure” number theory has been pressed into impure service as the basis for public-key cryptography, which allows customers to send encrypted credit card information to an online store without any exchange of secret cryptographic keys, thus making trillions of dollars worth of e-commerce possible; and that his work in a branch of mathematics called functional analysis proved fundamental to the notorious Black-Scholes equation, used on Wall Street to price financial derivatives.

The irony of pure mathematics begetting crass commercialism is not lost on Michael Harris, whose *Mathematics Without Apologies* irreverently echoes Hardy’s classic title. Harris is a distinguished middle-aged American mathematician who works in the gloriously pure stratosphere where algebra, geometry, and number theory meet. “The guiding problem for the first part of my career,” he writes, was “the Conjecture of Birch and Swinnerton-Dyer,” which

“concerns the simplest class of polynomial equations—elliptic curves—for which there is no simple way to decide whether the number of solutions is finite or infinite.” One such elliptic curve is $y^2 = x^3 - 25x$, which can be shown to have infinitely many rational solutions (that is, solutions that are whole numbers or fractions); another is $y^2 = x^3 - x$, which has only finitely many solutions. Though elementary in appearance, elliptic curves turn out to have a deep structure that makes them endlessly interesting.

Harris has spent much of his research career in Paris, and it shows: his book

ematics: that it is beautiful, true, or even much good, at least in the utilitarian “Golden Goose” sense. “It is not only dishonest but also self-defeating to pretend that research in pure mathematics is motivated by potential applications,” he writes. He notes that public-key cryptography, by making the world safe for Amazon, has destroyed the corner bookstore (in America, not France, where online retailers are prohibited by law from offering free shipping on discounted books). And he displays an olympian scorn for the sudden popularity of “finance mathematics,” which offers

a somewhat broader population of students occupied with courses that serve to crush the dreams of superfluous applicants to particularly desirable professions (as freshman calculus used to be a formal requirement to enter medical school in the United States).

Although physicians don’t really need calculus, Harris at least concedes that engineers, economists, and inventory managers couldn’t get by without a fair amount of math, even if it is trivial math by his lights.

Finally, there is the presumed value of mathematical truth. Since the ancient Greeks, mathematics has been taken as a paradigm of knowledge: certain, timeless, necessary. But knowledge of what? Do the truths discovered by mathematics describe an eternal and otherworldly realm of objects—perfect circles and so forth—that exist quite independently of the mathematicians who contemplate them? Or are mathematical objects actually human constructions, existing only in our minds? Or, more radically still, could it be that pure mathematics doesn’t really describe any objects at all, that it is just an elaborate game of formal symbols played with pencil and paper?

The question of what mathematics is really about is one that continues to vex philosophers, but it does not much worry Harris. Philosophers who concern themselves with the problems of mathematical existence and truth, he claims, typically pay little attention to what mathematicians actually do. He invidiously contrasts what he calls “philosophy of Mathematics” (with a capital *M*)—“a purely hypothetical subject invented by philosophers”—with “philosophy of (small-*m*) mathematics,” which takes as its starting point not a priori questions about epistemology and ontology, but rather the activity of working mathematicians.

Here, Harris is being a little unfair. He fails to remark that the standard competing positions in the philosophy of mathematics were originally staked out not by philosophers, but by mathematicians—indeed, some of the greatest of the last century. It was David Hilbert—a “supergiant,” in Harris’s estimation—who originated “formalism,” which views higher mathematics as a game played with formal symbols. Henri Poincaré (another “supergiant”), Hermann Weyl, and L. E. J. Brouwer were behind “intuitionism,” according to which numbers and other mathematical objects are mind-dependent constructions. Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead took the position known as “logicism,” endeavoring to show in their massive *Principia Mathematica* that mathematics was really logic in disguise. And “platonicism”—the idea that mathematics describes a perfect and eternal realm of mind-independent objects, like Plato’s world of Forms—was championed by Kurt Gödel.

All of these mathematical figures were passionately engaged in what Harris slighted as philosophy of Mathematics-with-a-capital-*M*. The de-



Kurt Gödel and Albert Einstein, Princeton, New Jersey, 1954

is full of Gallic intellectual playfulness, plus references to figures like Pierre Bourdieu, Issey Miyake, and Catherine Millet (“the sexual Stakhanovite”), and mention of the endless round of Parisian champagne receptions where “mathematical notes are compared for the first glass or two, after which conversation reverts to university politics and gossip.” It is rambling, sardonic (the term “fuck-you money” appears in the index), and witty. It contains fascinating literary digressions, such as an analysis of the occult mathematical structure of Thomas Pynchon’s novels, and lovely little interludes on elementary math, inspired by Harris’s gallant attempt to explain number theory to a British actress at a Manhattan dinner party.

Starting with the simple definition of a prime number, he builds, bit by bit, to an explanation of the aforementioned Birch-Swinnerton-Dyer conjecture—which, at a press conference given in Paris in the year 2000 by an international group of leading mathematicians, was declared to be one of seven “Millennium Prize Problems” whose resolution would be rewarded by a million-dollar prize. The book takes an intimate look at the deepest developments in contemporary mathematics, especially the visionary work of the recently deceased Alexander Grothendieck. And it successfully conveys what Harris calls the “pathos” of the mathematician’s calling.

Harris is rudely skeptical of the usual justifications for pure math-

a path to derivative-fueled wealth on Wall Street:

A colleague boasted that Columbia’s mathematical finance program was underwriting the lavish daily spreads of fresh fruit, cheese, and chocolate brownies, when other departments, including mine in Paris, were lucky to offer a few teabags and a handful of cookies to calorie-starved graduate students.

Even at France’s elite École Polytechnique, 70 percent of the mathematics students today aspire to a career in finance.

Nor is Harris impressed with the claim, voiced by Hardy and so many others, that pure mathematics is justified by its beauty. When mathematicians talk about beauty, he tells us, what they really mean is pleasure. “Outside this relaxed field, it’s considered poor form to admit that we are motivated by pleasure,” Harris writes. “Aesthetics is a way of reconciling this motivation with the ‘lofty habit of mind.’”

Why should society pay for a small group of people to exercise their creative powers on something they enjoy? “If a government minister asked me that question,” Harris writes,

I could claim that mathematicians, like other academics, are needed in the universities to teach a specific population of students the skills needed for the development of a technological society and to keep

bate among them and their partisans was fierce in the 1920s, often spilling over into personal animus. And no wonder: mathematics at the time was undergoing a “crisis” that had resulted from a series of confidence-shaking developments, like the emergence of non-Euclidean geometries and the discovery of paradoxes in set theory. If the old ideal of certainty was to be salvaged, it was felt, mathematics had to be put on a new and secure foundation. At issue was the very way mathematics would be practiced: what types of proof would be accepted as valid, what uses of infinity would be permitted.

For reasons both technical and philosophical, none of the competing foundational programs of the early twentieth century proved satisfactory. (Gödel’s “incompleteness theorems,” in particular, created insuperable problems both for Hilbert’s formalism and for Russell and Whitehead’s logicism: they showed—roughly speaking—that the rules of Hilbert’s mathematical “game” could never be proved consistent, and that a logical system like that of Russell and Whitehead could never capture all mathematical truths.) The issues of mathematical existence and truth remain unresolved, and philosophers have continued to grapple with them, if inconclusively—as witness the frank title that Hilary Putnam gave to a 1979 paper: “Philosophy of Mathematics: Why Nothing Works.”

To Harris, this looks a bit *vieux jeu*. The sense of crisis in the profession, so acute less than a century ago, has receded; the old difficulties have been patched up or papered over. If you ask a contemporary mathematician to declare a philosophical party affiliation, the joke goes, you’ll hear “platonist” on weekdays and “formalist” on Sundays: that is, when they’re working at mathematics, mathematicians regard it as being about a mind-independent reality; but when they’re in a reflective mood, many claim to believe that it’s just a meaningless game played with formal symbols.

Today, as Harris observes, paradigm shifts in mathematics have less to do with “crisis” and more to do with finding superior methods. It used to be thought, for example, that all mathematics could be constructed out of sets. Starting with the simple idea of one thing being a member of another, set theory shows how structures of seemingly limitless complexity—number systems, geometrical spaces, a never-ending hierarchy of infinities—can be built up out of the most modest materials. The number zero, for example, can be defined as the “empty set”: that is, the set that has no members at all. The number one can then be defined as the set that contains one element—zero and nothing else. Two, in turn, can be defined as the set that contains zero and one—and so on, with the set for each subsequent number containing the sets for all the previous numbers. Numbers, instead of being taken as basic, can thus be viewed as pure sets of increasingly intricate structure.

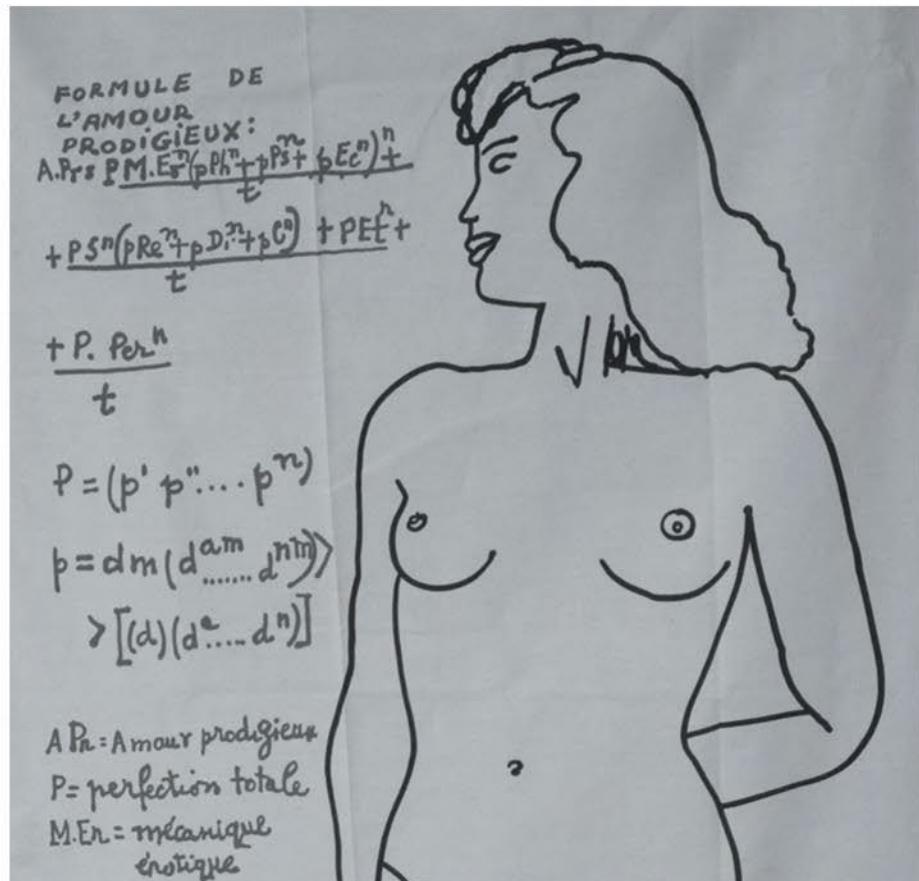
In the 1930s, a cabal of brilliant young Paris mathematicians, including André Weil, resolved to make the house of mathematics more secure by rebuilding it on the logical foundation of set theory. The project, under the collective nom de guerre “Bourbaki,”

went on for decades, resulting in one fat treatise after another. Among its consequences, crazily enough, was the advent of the “new math” education reforms back in the 1960s, which so befuddled American schoolchildren and their parents by replacing intuitive talk of numbers with the alien jargon of sets.

Physicists talk about finding the “theory of everything”; well, set theory is so sweeping in its generality that it might appear to be (as Harris quips) “the theory of theories of everything.” It certainly appeared that way to the members of Bourbaki. Yet a few decades after their program got underway, the extraordinary Alexander Grothendieck came into their midst and transcended

been founded by a private businessman outside Paris in the woods of Bois-Marie. There Grothendieck spent the next dozen years astonishing his elite colleagues and younger disciples as he recreated the landscape of higher mathematics.

Grothendieck was a physically imposing man, shaven-headed and handsome, as charismatic as he was austere. A staunch pacifist and antimilitarist, he refused to go to Moscow in 1966 (where the International Congress of Mathematics was being held) to accept the Fields Medal, the highest honor in mathematics. He did, however, make



A mathematical formula for love by Isidore Isou, 1988; from Michael Harris's Mathematics Without Apologies

it. In doing so, he created a new style of pure mathematics that proved as fruitful as it was dizzyingly abstract. Long before his death last November at the age of eighty-six in a remote hamlet in the Pyrenees, Grothendieck had come to be regarded as the greatest mathematician of the last half-century. As Harris observes, he likely qualifies as the “most romantic,” too: “his life story begs for fictional treatment.”

The raw facts are astounding enough. Alexander Grothendieck was born in Berlin in 1928 to parents who were both active anarchists. His father, a Russian Jew, took part in the 1905 uprising against the tsarist regime and the 1917 revolution. He escaped imprisonment under the Bolsheviks; clashed with Nazi thugs on the streets of Berlin; fought on the Republican side in the Spanish civil war (as did Grothendieck’s mother); and was deported, after the fall of France, from Paris to Auschwitz to be murdered.

His mother, a gentile from Hamburg, raised Grothendieck in the south of France. There the boy showed talent both for numbers and for boxing. After the war, he made his way to Paris to study mathematics under the great Henri Cartan. Following early teaching stints in São Paulo, Kansas, and Harvard, Grothendieck was invited in 1958 to join the Institut des Hautes Études Scientifiques, which had just

a trip the next year to North Vietnam, where he lectured on pure mathematics in the jungle to students who had been evacuated from Hanoi to escape the American bombing. He remained (by choice) stateless most of his life, had three children by a woman he married and two more out of wedlock, founded the radical ecology group Survivre et Vivre, and once got arrested for knocking down a couple of gendarmes at a political demonstration in Avignon.

Owing to his unyielding and sometimes paranoiac sense of integrity, Grothendieck ended up alienating himself from the French mathematical establishment. In the early 1990s he vanished into the Pyrenees—where, it was reported by the handful of admirers who managed to track him down, he spent his remaining years subsisting on dandelion soup and meditating on how a malign metaphysical force was destroying the divine harmony of the world, possibly by slightly altering the speed of light. The local villagers were said to look after him.

Grothendieck’s vision of mathematics led him to develop a new language—it might even be called an “ideology”—in which hitherto unimaginable ideas could be expressed. He was the first, Harris observes (breaking into emphatic boldface), “to be guided by the principle that **knowing a mathematical object is tantamount to knowing its relations**

to all other objects of the same kind.” In other words, if you want to know the real nature of a mathematical object, don’t look inside of it, but see how it plays with its peers.

Such a peer group of mathematical objects is called, in a deliberate nod to Aristotle and Kant, a “category.” One category might consist of abstract surfaces. These surfaces play together, in the sense that there are natural ways of going back and forth between them that respect their general form. For example, if two surfaces have the same number of holes—like a donut and a coffee mug—one surface can, mathematically, be smoothly transformed into the other.

Another category might consist of all the different algebraic systems that have an operation akin to multiplication; these algebras too play together, in the sense that there are natural ways of going back and forth between them that respect their common multiplicative structure. Such structure-preserving back-and-forth relations among objects in the same category are called “morphisms,” or sometimes—to stress their abstract nature—“arrows.” They determine the overall shape of the play within a category.

And here’s where it gets interesting: the play in one category—say, the category of surfaces—might be subtly mimicked by the play in another—say, the category of algebras. The two categories themselves can be seen to play together: there is a natural way of going back and forth between them, called a “functor.” Armed with such a functor, one can reason quite generally about both categories, without getting bogged down in the particular details of each. It might also be noticed that, since categories play with one another, they themselves form a category: the category of categories.

Category theory was invented in the 1940s by Saunders Mac Lane of the University of Chicago and Samuel Eilenberg of Columbia. At first it was regarded dubiously by many mathematicians, earning the nickname “abstract nonsense.” How could such a rarefied approach to mathematics, in which nearly all its classical content seemed to be drained away, result in anything but sterility? Yet Grothendieck made it sing. Between 1958 and 1970, he used category theory to create novel structures of unexampled richness. Since then, the heady abstractions of category theory have also become useful in theoretical physics, computer science, logic, and philosophy.*

The project undertaken by Grothendieck was one that began with Descartes: the unification of geometry and algebra. These have been likened to the yin and yang of mathematics: geometry is space, algebra is time; geometry is like painting, algebra is like music; and so on. Less fancifully, geometry is about form, algebra is about structure—in particular, the structure that lurks within equations. And as Descartes showed with his invention of “Cartesian coordinates,” equations can describe forms: $x^2 + y^2 = 1$, for example, describes a circle of radius 1. So algebra

*A charming and improbably successful attempt to explain category theory in culinary terms is made by the mathematician Eugenia Cheng in her new book *How to Bake Pi: An Edible Exploration of the Mathematics of Mathematics* (Basic Books, 2015).

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and geometry turn out to be intimately related, exchanging what André Weil called "subtle caresses."

In the 1940s, thanks to Weil's insight, it became apparent that the dialectic between geometry and algebra was the key to resolving some of the most stubbornly enduring mysteries in mathematics. And it was Grothendieck's labor that raised this dialectic to such a pitch of abstraction—one that was said to leave even the great Weil daunted—that a new understanding of these mysteries emerged. Grothendieck laid the groundwork for many of the greatest mathematical advances in recent decades, including the 1994 proof of Fermat's Last Theorem—a magnificent intellectual achievement of zero practical or commercial interest.

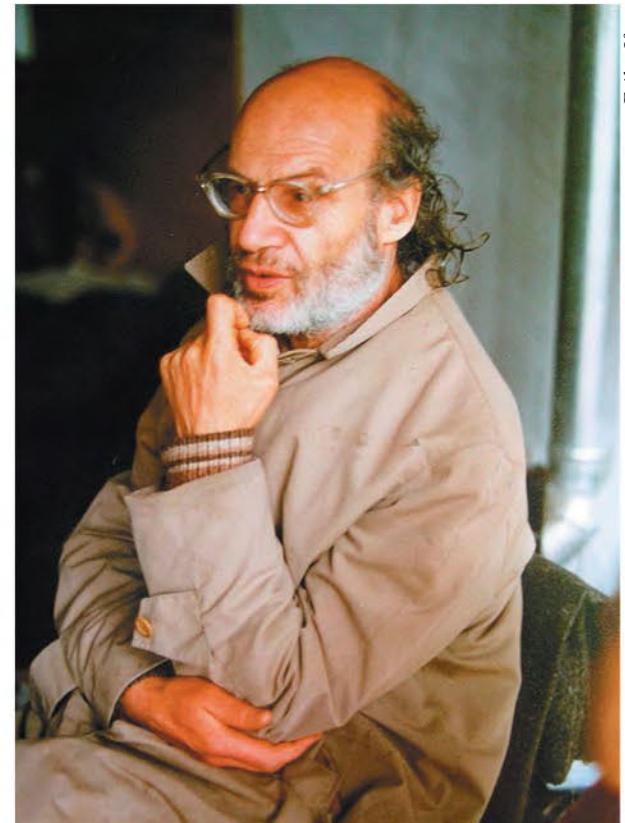
Harris, whose own impressive work is much indebted to Grothendieck, is eloquent in praising his "ruthless... minimalism," which extended to his contempt for money and his monkish wardrobe. I only wish that Harris had more conspicuously credited another figure in the modern transformation of mathematics, Emmy Noether. It was Noether, born in Bavaria in 1882, who largely created the abstract approach that inspired category theory. Yet as a woman in a male academic world, she was barred from holding a professorship in Göttingen, and the classicists and historians on the faculty even tried to block her from giving unpaid lectures—leading David Hilbert, the dean of German mathematics, to comment, "I see no reason why her sex should be an impediment to her appointment. After all, we are a university, not a bathhouse." Noether, who was Jewish, fled to the United States when the Nazis took power, teaching at Bryn Mawr until her death from a sudden infection in 1935.

The intellectual habit of grappling with a problem by ascending to higher and higher levels of generality came naturally to Emmy Noether, and it was shared by Grothendieck, who said that he liked to solve a problem not by the "hammer-and-chisel method," but by letting a sea of abstraction rise to "submerge and dissolve" it. In his vision, the familiar things dealt with by mathematicians, like equations, functions, and even geometrical points, were reborn as vastly more complex and versatile structures. The old things turned out to be mere shadows—or, as Grothendieck preferred to call them, "avatars"—of the new. (An avatar is originally an earthly manifestation of a Hindu god; as Harris notes, "a taste for Indian... metaphysics inflected [the] terminology" of many French mathematicians.)

Nor is this a one-off process. Each new abstraction is eventually revealed to be but an avatar of a still-higher abstraction. As Harris puts it, "the available concepts are interpreted as the *avatars* of the inaccessible concepts we are trying to grasp." With the grasping

of these new concepts, mathematics ascends a kind of "ladder" of increasing abstraction.

This, Harris says, is what philosophers should be paying attention to. "If you were to ask for a single characteristic of contemporary mathematics that cries out for philosophical analysis," he writes, "I would advise you to practice climbing the categorical and avatar ladders in search of meaning, rather than searching for solid Foundations." And what lies at the top of this ladder? Perhaps, Harris suggests with playful seriousness, there is One Big Theorem from which all of mathematics ultimately flows—"something on the order of *samsāra = nirvana*." But since there



Alexander Grothendieck, 1988

are infinitely many rungs to climb, it is unattainable.

Here, then, is the pathos of mathematics. Unlike theoretical physics, which can aspire to a "final theory" that would account for all the forces and particles in the universe, pure mathematics must concede the futility of its own quest for ultimate truth. As Harris observes, "every veil lifted only reveals another veil." The mathematician is doomed to what André Weil called an endless cycle of "knowledge and indifference."

But it could be worse. Thanks to Gödel's second incompleteness theorem—the one that says, roughly, that mathematics can never prove its own consistency—mathematicians can't be fully confident that the axioms underlying their enterprise do not harbor an as-yet-undiscovered logical contradiction. This possibility is "extremely unsettling for any rational mind," declared the Russian-born mathematician (and Fields medalist) Vladimir Voevodsky, in a speech on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of the Institute for Advanced Study. Indeed, the discovery of such an inconsistency would be fatal to pure mathematics, at least as we know it today. The distinction between truth and falsehood would be breached, the ladder of avatars would come crashing down, and the One Big Theorem would take a truly terrible form: $0 = 1$. Yet, oddly enough, e-commerce and financial derivatives would be left untouched. □

The Changing Faith of a Hero

Adam Kirsch

Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer
by Charles Marsh.
Knopf, 515 pp., \$35.00

One night in the fall of 1930, when he was twenty-four years old, Dietrich Bonhoeffer went to a Manhattan movie theater to see the new film of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Bonhoeffer, a young German theologian who was spending the academic year at Union Theological Seminary, was accompanied by another foreign student, the French pastor Jean Lasserre. Twelve years after World War I ended, Germans' resentment of their defeat and of the Treaty of Versailles remained ferocious—a sentiment shared by Bonhoeffer, who lost an older brother in the war.

For a German and Frenchman to see this war film together, then, was inevitably a fraught experience. But according to Lasserre's account of the evening, he and Bonhoeffer were unexpectedly drawn together, out of horror at the reaction of the surrounding audience:

The audience was American but, since the film had been made from the German soldiers' point of view, everyone immediately sympathized with them. When French soldiers were killed onscreen, the crowd laughed and applauded.

Bonhoeffer was hurt on his friend's behalf, as Lasserre recalled: "I was very affected and he was also affected, but because of me." And the experience, trivial as it might seem, drove home for both men the true meaning of Christian ecumenism: "I think it was there both of us discovered that the communion, the community of the Church is much more important than the national community."

One might not expect a turning point in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life to come in a New York cinema. After all, he was one of the twentieth century's most important Christian thinkers, a product of the University of Berlin's legendary theology faculty, and a martyr who lost his life in the resistance to Hitler. Yet one of the revelations of *Strange Glory*, Charles Marsh's new biography, is how Bonhoeffer managed to combine mortal earnestness about faith with a talent for enjoying life in this world.

In the mid-1930s, at a time when the German church had fallen almost completely under the sway of the Third Reich, Bonhoeffer led a quasi-clandestine seminary at Finkenwalde, sixty miles northwest of Berlin, where he trained ministers for the dissenting Confessing Church. Though a Lutheran institution, Finkenwalde was structured almost like a Catholic monastery, in which the students were "bound together by brotherly admonition and discipline and open confession" in a way that some of them found

oppressive. "There was too much 'must' for us," said one student quoted by Marsh. Even here, however, Bonhoeffer was given to bursts of sheer fun, encouraging his students to play tennis or bridge, go swimming in the Baltic Sea, or even, on one occasion, attend a costume party he had organized.

At the very end of his life, as he awaited death in a Nazi prison, Bonhoeffer elevated this kind of joyous embrace of the world to a theological principle. "Bonhoeffer discovered the value of *hilaritas*—good humor—as the

hoeffer sees those traditional forms of religiosity vanishing before his eyes, above all in Nazi Germany. When Christianity disappears, for Bonhoeffer, what remains is Christ himself, in all His scandalous immediacy: "In that case Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different, really the Lord of the world. But what does that mean?"

dissuade him: "Look at the church," they insisted. "A more paltry institution one can hardly imagine." But Dietrich was self-confident enough to meet the challenge: "In that case," he replied, "I shall reform it!"

This early exchange seems to contain the seeds of much of Bonhoeffer's later development as a pastor and theologian. One of the recurring themes of his writings, both academic essays and sermons, is the mediocrity of the Lutheran Church as he found it in Weimar-era Germany. Luther may have urged the faithful to "sin boldly," but what Bonhoeffer saw all around him was a mild piety that treated Christianity more as a form of polite behavior than a living faith. He longed throughout his life for a community of believers who would constitute a true church, rather than merely go to church. His first sustained piece of theological writing—his doctoral dissertation at the University of Berlin, written in 1927 when he was just twenty-one years old—was titled *Sanctorum Communio*, "The Communion of Saints," and it sharply contrasted the ideal church with the actually existing one.

"The churchliness of the modern bourgeoisie," he wrote, "is threadbare, and...their living power in the church is at an end.... The sermon meets the need for having something fine and educated and moral for the free hours of Sunday." He sees the church's mediocrity betrayed in its aesthetics:

If I consider the pictures hanging in church halls and meeting places, or the architectural styles of churches of recent decades...I cannot help thinking that in none of these things is there the slightest understanding of the church's essential social nature.

The modern church was a far cry from the ideal church as Bonhoeffer imagined it—an institution in which

persons can and should act like Christ. They should bear their neighbor's burdens and sufferings.... What makes this state of being "with one another" possible is not something willed by us; it is given only in the community of saints....

But once he left the university and got his first taste of actual pastoral work, Bonhoeffer began to realize that just getting people to show up on Sunday was hard enough. At the beginning of 1928, he began working as assistant vicar of the German congregation in Barcelona. Amusingly, Marsh shows the young Bonhoeffer as still a rather feckless and spoiled young man, continually postponing his arrival in Spain and bombarding his new boss with questions about what clothes to bring ("would he need dinner clothes, or 'special evening wear'?"). When he finally showed up, he found that of the six thousand Germans living in Barcelona, only about fifty came to church. Nor was he impressed by the spiritual caliber of those who did come:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer at an ecumenical conference, Gland, Switzerland, August 1932

quality of mind, body, and spirit most important to animating the greatest human achievements," Marsh writes. And in his letters from prison, which became some of the most influential religious writings of the twentieth century, Bonhoeffer mounted a critique of religion's tendency to focus on "human weakness and human boundaries." Religious people, he complained, tended to use God as "*deus ex machina*" that they bring on to the scene...for the apparent solution of insoluble problems," such as death and sin. But

I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the center, not in weaknesses but in strength; and therefore not in death and guilt but in man's life and goodness.... God is beyond in the midst of our life. The church stands, not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village.

When Bonhoeffer speaks, in these late letters, about the need for "religionless Christianity," the paradoxical formulation is not intended to diminish faith, but on the contrary, to present it anew in its true radical challenge. "Religion," he reflects in April 1944, "is only a garment of Christianity," a set of institutions and behaviors, and Bon-

¹*No Ordinary Men: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hans von Dohnanyi, Resisters Against Hitler in Church and State* (New York Review Books, 2013).

Bonhoeffer said he had never seen people so visibly impressed by their own wealth. He heard the director of the German bank boast about a recent gala for which ten thousand pesetas had been spent on the decorations alone.

Bonhoeffer enjoyed his year in Barcelona—he joined a tennis club, socialized with the German expatriates, and made something of a sensation in the pulpit, incurring the jealousy of his superior. More important, Marsh shows, his spiritual temperament was broadened by the experience of living in a southern, Catholic city. Surprisingly, perhaps, for a Lutheran minister, Bonhoeffer thrilled to Holy Week parades—just as, during a youthful trip to Rome, he had been strongly drawn to the sensual pageantry of Italian Catholicism. His appreciation of the world's beauty, and of religion's, was expanding, as he admitted: “He would say that he felt as if a theology of... spring and summer’ were replacing ‘the Berlin winter theology.”

Still, he went back to Berlin after a year in Spain, to complete the second dissertation he needed to win a teaching post in the German university system. He would spend the next year and a half there, producing the book *Act and Being*, and a prestigious academic career seemed to be on the horizon. But the real turning point in Bonhoeffer's education, Marsh argues, came during his year at Union Theological Seminary in New York, in 1930–1931. When he first got there, Bonhoeffer was snobbishly unimpressed by the quality of the faculty and students, whose thought lacked the richness and subtlety he was used to in Berlin. “The students,” he observed, “are completely clueless with respect to what dogmatics is really about. They are not familiar with even the most basic questions.” Once again, Bonhoeffer was troubled by Christians who did not seem to take Christianity seriously: during one class discussion, the students laughed out loud at Luther's notion of “bondage of the will.” “The spectacle of an educated person taking seriously the ruminations of a neurotic sixteenth-century monk,” Marsh writes, “struck them as comic.”

At first, Marsh shows, Bonhoeffer was even unimpressed by Reinhold Niebuhr, Union's leading light, who he believed was too focused on social problems: “Is this a theological school or a school for politicians?” Bonhoeffer asked Niebuhr impatiently. But his exposure to Niebuhr's ideas, and to the American style of socially engaged, pragmatic Christianity, was crucial in turning his attention to the way faith could, and must, intersect with reality, including social and political reality. Above all, his eyes were opened by his exposure to African-American churches, to which he was introduced by a black fellow student. Worshiping at Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church was, Bonhoeffer exclaimed, the first time “he had experienced true religion in the United States.” His experiences in the black community, as well as classes at Union that involved visits to labor and civil rights organizations, would awaken his political consciousness and give him a glimpse of the kind of “communion of saints” he found lacking at home.

As it turned out, this new orientation in Bonhoeffer's thought came at

just the right time. For he returned to a Germany in the throes of political chaos, and with Hitler's seizure of power in January 1933, the Lutheran Church was thrown right into the center of the fray. A faction known as *Deutsche Christen*, “German Christians,” was eager to see the German Protestant Church remade along Nazi lines—both theologically, by claiming “that God had chosen a new Israel, the German *Volk*,” and organizationally, by subordinating the church to the Third Reich. The first item on the Nazi agenda was, naturally, anti-Semitic: in an Aryan church, there would be no room for converted Jews, whose race was more important than their beliefs. The so-called Aryan paragraph, made into law on April 7, 1933, forbade “Jewish Christians” from serving as ministers, as part of the larger purge of Jews from the civil service.

It was now that Bonhoeffer's strict Christian principles began to lead him to publicly oppose the Nazi state. This represented a break with the traditional Lutheran doctrine of the “two kingdoms,” which saw state power as itself an instrument of God. The German Christians actively supported the Aryan paragraph, and most others were willing to tolerate it, or at least didn't find it sufficient grounds for a public break with the Church. Bonhoeffer, however, immediately began circulating a mimeographed protest statement, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” in which he audaciously urged Christians “to jam a spoke in the wheel” of the Third Reich, on the grounds that “the state which endangers the Christian proclamation negates itself.” Bonhoeffer was not yet opposing anti-Semitism per se, but the idea that race could take precedence over Christian belief, disqualifying a believer from membership in the national church, seemed to him an appalling insult to the church's independence and to Christian doctrine.

A few months later, in August 1933, Bonhoeffer joined a meeting of other dissenting ministers at Bethel hospital in Westphalia. There they began to draw up a statement for what would become the Confessing Church, the anti-Nazi dissident movement that tried to hold out against state domination. By the time the so-called Bethel Confession was officially adopted, it had been moderated and watered down so much that Bonhoeffer refused to sign it. But his initial draft, which is excerpted along with many of his principal works in the volume *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, puts the Jewish question front and center.²

Its terms are not, it must be said, those of liberalism and equality, but rather of Christian toleration. Essentially, Bonhoeffer advances the old argument of Saint Augustine (brilliantly analyzed by Paula Fredriksen in *Augustine and the Jews*) that the Jews should not be molested, but left to survive as a witness to the Bible and as potential converts to Christianity: “God continues to preserve a ‘holy remnant’ of Israel after the flesh.... The church has re-

ceived from its Lord the commission to call the Jews to repentance and to baptize those who believe in Jesus Christ,” Bonhoeffer insists. Theologically speaking, it is necessary for the Jews to remain alive as a scattered, exiled minority, which is why Bonhoeffer's statement explicitly opposes not just “Pharaoh-like measures” to “exterminate” them, but also “emancipation and assimilation” and “Zionist and other similar movements” that try to make the Jews “one nation among others.”

But while Bonhoeffer was not quite advocating Jewish equality, he was taking a clear and brave stand against Nazi persecution—a stand that most of his fellow ministers couldn't bring themselves to share. (Even the great theologian

seminary, between 1935 and 1937, Bonhoeffer tried to create a Christian community “according to the Sermon on the Mount,” as he told his skeptical brother Karl-Friedrich. In the book that grew out of that experience, published in English as *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer inveighs against what he calls “cheap grace”:

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth.... Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain as it was before.

In contrast to this undemanding, external conception, Bonhoeffer urges the faithful to accept “costly grace”:

“Costly grace is the gospel which must be *sought* again and again, the gift which must be *asked* for, the door at which a person must *knock*

Life with community had been central to Bonhoeffer's vision of Christianity from the beginning. But as Marsh's biography continues, one kind of fellowship becomes conspicuous by its absence: until almost the age of thirty, Bonhoeffer never seems to have had a romantic relationship. That changed at Finkenwalde, Marsh argues, when he met Eberhard Bethge, a student at the seminary. Bethge usually features in the Bonhoeffer story as a best friend and spiritual confidant, and ultimately as Bonhoeffer's first biographer and the guardian of his legacy. But Marsh makes a convincing, if necessarily speculative, case that, on Bonhoeffer's side at least, the relationship was more like romantic love than friendship. The two men lived together, “kept a joint bank account, signed Christmas cards from ‘Dietrich and Eberhard,’ fussed over gifts they gave together, planned elaborate vacations, and endured numerous quarrels.”

Though Marsh doesn't use the word, the clear implication is that their relationship was a marriage—although he shows that it was Bonhoeffer who kept pressing for greater intimacy, while Bethge kept up a measure of reserve. It seems no coincidence that when Bonhoeffer finally did get engaged in 1943—to Maria von Wedemeyer, a much younger woman he didn't know well—it was immediately after Bethge announced his plans to be married (to none other than Bonhoeffer's niece).

Bonhoeffer's marriage, however, was never to take place; a few months after the engagement was announced, he was in prison. After years of openly opposing the Third Reich on religious questions, in the summer of 1940 Bonhoeffer had joined an active plot against Hitler within the Abwehr, the German military intelligence service, a hive of conspiracy, whose ranks included Hans von Dohnanyi, the husband of Bonhoeffer's sister Christine. Dohnanyi recruited Bonhoeffer to serve as a secret agent playing a perilous double game. Ostensibly, his job would be to use his international contacts to gather information for the military. In fact, he would use those contacts to “try to keep the Allies apprised of resistance activities in the hopes of garnering in-



Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his twin sister Sabine during their last visit together, London, July 1939

Karl Barth, Marsh notes, “disagreed sharply with [Bonhoeffer's] position on the Aryan paragraph and its centrality in the Bethel Confession,” though he would later “come to regret the tepidness and legalism of his response.”

Throughout the 1930s, Bonhoeffer would continue to oppose the Nazification of the church in word and deed. He became one of the leaders of the ecumenical movement, visiting many European countries to meet with like-minded clergy, and always insisting that the Confessing Church, rather than the official Reich Church, should be considered the true representative of German Christianity. At one such meeting, in Fano, Denmark, in 1934, Bonhoeffer delivered an eloquent address on “The Church and the People of the World,” in which he laid out the terms of what had become his absolute pacifism:

Peace on earth is not a problem, but a commandment given at Christ's coming.... “Must God not have meant that we should talk about peace,... but that it is not to be literally translated into action? Must God not have really said that we should work for peace, of course, but also make ready tanks and poison gas for security?”... No, God did not say all that. What God has said is that there shall be peace among people—that we shall obey God without further question, that is what God means.

It's clear that the thread running through Bonhoeffer's thought from beginning to end was the desire to take Christ seriously—not to be respectfully pious, but to make an existential decision for God. At the Finkenwalde

²Edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (HarperCollins, 1990).

ternational support for a non-Nazi government to follow the planned coup."

Thus in May 1942, Bonhoeffer secretly flew to Sweden to meet with George Bell, the bishop of Chichester and one of his old allies from the ecumenical movement. He "asked Bell to ascertain whether the Allies would be prepared to negotiate with a new government," in the event that the conspirators managed to assassinate Hitler and take over Germany. Marsh shows how this overture came to nothing—Anthony Eden, Churchill's secretary of state for war, felt the conspirators had "given little evidence of seriousness,"

and indeed for the first years of the war the Abwehr's resistance remained more notional than effective. Nothing Bonhoeffer did made a dent in Hitler's power or plans—which does not mean that he didn't show great courage in secretly plotting against the dictator.

Just how much was at stake became clear in April 1943, when the Gestapo, which had long been suspicious of the Abwehr circle, cracked down in a mass arrest of the conspirators, including Dohnanyi and Bonhoeffer. At first, the charges against Bonhoeffer seemed to be minor, having mainly to do with his evasion of military service and his suspi-

cious trips abroad. He was still in prison, however, more than a year later, when on July 20, 1944, Claus von Stauffenberg made his failed attempt to assassinate Hitler with a bomb. In the aftermath of this shock, the Gestapo launched a thorough investigation that unearthed a cache of secret documents hidden by Dohnanyi, which detailed the plotters' plans, including Bonhoeffer's role in them. From then on, Bonhoeffer knew he was doomed, unless he could somehow survive until the Allied victory that seemed to be coming closer and closer.

He almost made it. In February 1945, however, he was taken from his night-

marish Berlin prison and sent to Buchenwald. Then, in the last weeks of the war, with the Third Reich he had long opposed crumbling around him, Bonhoeffer and a group of fellow prisoners were taken by SS guards to another concentration camp, at Flossenbürg in Bavaria. On the morning of April 9, Bonhoeffer was hanged, alongside the former heads of the Abwehr, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris and General Hans Oster; his body was either cremated or thrown into a mass grave. It was then that his second life began, the life of his thought and example, which *Strange Glory* helps to share with a new generation of readers. □

Noble, Embattled Souls

James Walton

The Bone Clocks

by David Mitchell.
Random House, 624 pp.,
\$30.00; \$18.00 (paper)

Slade House

by David Mitchell.
Random House, 238 pp., \$26.00

"As an experienced editor," says the pompous publisher Timothy Cavendish in David Mitchell's third novel, *Cloud Atlas*, "I disapprove of flashbacks, foreshadowings, and tricksy devices; they belong in the 1980s with MAs in postmodernism." But this declaration is, of course, a tricksy device—and not just because Mitchell's own MA was in postmodern fiction. *Cloud Atlas* famously consists of six novellas, all crammed with flashbacks, foreshadowings, and tricksy devices of various kinds, and each set in a different time and place, from the nineteenth-century Pacific to a postapocalyptic Hawaii. The six are connected by their common themes—including rapaciousness and the dangers of human tribalism—and by the book's structure, with every narrative breaking off halfway, until the Hawaii story is told in full, and we then get the conclusion of the previous five in reverse order. (And that's the simplified explanation.) Yet what's perhaps most remarkable of all about *Cloud Atlas* is how world-conquering it proved to be: it is one of the few intricately constructed nests of centuries-spanning stories to have been made into a movie, starring Tom Hanks and Halle Berry.

So how has Mitchell pulled off the same trick the Beatles once did—acclaimed by critics for his technical daring, while still almost universally enjoyed? The answer, I think, is for the literary equivalent of the same reason. On the whole, no matter how experimental the Beatles became, they never forgot the importance of a good tune. Likewise, however challenging Mitchell's novels might seem, they've always provided plenty of classic old-school storytelling, complete with narrative twists and thrilling set pieces. "I'm a plot 'n' character guy," he insists—and one who believes that the best books "stroke your brain and milk your adrenaline gland at the same time."

With some writers, the brainstroking might be produced by the exploration of highly complex ideas. With Mitchell—and again, this might



David Mitchell, New York City, 2010; photograph by Dominique Nabokov

help to explain his popularity—it's more related to the solving of puzzles and the making of connections. Once you've put the various elements of his books together, there's generally no difficulty distinguishing the bad characters (greedy, often murderous) from the good ones (fundamentally kindly, but unafraid to fight villainy). Nor is there much likelihood of disagreeing with his central themes: that cruelty and oppression are wrong, and that any hope of a better world lies with people

laying aside their divisions.¹ Nevertheless, there's no denying the pleasure to be gained from making the connec-

¹At the risk of overdoing the Beatles analogy, the closing pages of *Cloud Atlas* are not unlike a nineteenth-century-prose version of John Lennon's "Imagine": "If we believe divers races & creeds can share this world... peacefully... if we believe... the riches of the Earth [must be]... shared equitably, such a world will come to pass."

tions—especially given the infectious exuberance of all that storytelling.

It was a method that Mitchell announced in his first novel, *Ghostwritten* (1999). Not for him the obviously autobiographical portrait of a bookish teenager growing up in middle England. Instead, he gave us ten loosely overlapping novellas by nine narrators on three continents, and in genres that ranged from romance to thriller, science fiction to social realism. Next came *Number9Dream*—its title taken from a John Lennon song—which, despite being based around the single quest of a Japanese boy for his father, also threw in an impressive selection of literary forms and subplots, of which the most esoteric concerned a story-writing goat on a fairy-tale search for "the truly untold tale."

After taking the mosaic technique still further in *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell appeared to downsize into something more conventional with *Black Swan Green*—oddly enough, an obviously autobiographical portrait of a bookish teenager growing up in middle England. Yet not only was there a certain tricksiness involved in what he called "writing a first novel with the experience of having written three novels already," but the book also confirmed another ambitious aspect of his fiction: that its connections aren't confined to each individual work. One of the characters is the elderly Eva van Outryve de Crommelynck, last seen as a young woman in 1930s Belgium in *Cloud Atlas*. Another is Neal Brose, the money-obsessed banker in *Ghostwritten*, here in his younger days as a money-obsessed classmate of the narrator, Jason Taylor. "I've come to realize," Mitchell has said, "that I'm bringing into being a fictional universe with its own cast, and that each of my books is one chapter in a sort of sprawling macronovel." Or as he more self-deprecatingly put it elsewhere, "I'm really best at writing novellas, [but] I'm a novella-writer and a maximalist."

For those who like to spot the links between Mitchell novels, his next book, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, set on a Dutch trading post in eighteenth-century Japan, offered comparatively slim pickings. But that's because, as his following novel revealed, it contained more foreshadowings than flashbacks, with both a central crime and a minor character

resurfacing in *The Bone Clocks* in vastly expanded form.

To explain how requires some backtracking—to perhaps the single strangest aspect of Mitchell's work: its unashamed, even blithe use of souls as a narrative device. In real life, he has said, "I doubt that we have [souls] and I hope that I'm wrong." In his fiction, they crop up regularly—not, it would seem, as part of any grand spiritual system or even as something to be understood symbolically, but simply as another element of his storytelling, to be taken at face value. True, the defining characteristic of souls in his fiction is familiar from Judeo-Christian tradition (so familiar, in fact, that Mitchell rather takes it for granted and expects the reader to do the same): they are a person's noncorporeal essence. Yet Mitchell also endows them with an unusual degree of mobility—as well as making them vulnerable to unusually literal forms of attack.

In the early books, it was the mobility that predominated. One section of *Ghostwritten* is narrated by a "noncorporeal," a soul that successively enters dozens of living people, coexisting with their own soul, while absorbing their memories and occasionally shaping their actions. In *Cloud Atlas*, there was a firm suggestion that the main character in every story was a reincarnation of the same soul—another tricksy device to which Timothy Cavendish objects. ("Far too hippie-druggy-new age.")

But then in *The Thousand Autumns*, the use of souls took on a more sinister aspect. The book was rightly praised for its depiction of the uneasy relationship between Japan and the West, done with just the right combination of historical research and novelistic imagination. Tucked in the middle, though, was a very different type of story, in which imagination was all. In a Japanese hilltop monastery, a group of women were kept in sexual slavery to breed babies for the monks. The peculiar reason why was eventually revealed when, in best Bond-villain style, the monastery's abbot outlined the whole dastardly scheme to one of the good characters just before killing him. The babies, he proudly explained, were immediately murdered so that the monks could "distill their souls" and "imbibe" them as a way of gaining immortality—which is why the abbot himself was more than six hundred years old.

Now, in *The Bone Clocks*, the same crime, known in Mitchell's world as "Animicide" (the murder of the soul), has become more global, and even madder, thanks to a secret group called the Anchorites. While their name might suggest religious hermits, sadly for the rest of humanity this is misleading. Instead, these Anchorites—or to give them their full title, the Anchorites of the Dusk Chapel of the Blind Cathar of the Thomasite Monastery of Sidelhorn Pass—were born ordinary mortals, but have discovered a way to avoid the aging process by finding psychically gifted people (ideally children), killing them, and drinking their souls in the form of "Black Wine." And just in case that's not mysterious enough, they can also appear wherever they want in the world, can recruit other people to their "syndicate of soul thieves," and, once they've sourced a suitably psychic victim, can open an "Aperture" from any-

where on earth straight to that Dusk Chapel in the Alps where the soul-drinking takes place.

And this, I'm afraid, is the heart of what's wrong with the book. Moments of overdone fantasy writing are nothing new in Mitchell's work. The difference here is that they're no longer moments. Instead, they end up not merely pushing the transmigration of souls well beyond absurdity, but also swamping what might otherwise have been another satisfying series of interlocking novellas. Moreover, that we don't find out properly about the Anchorites until page 450 means there's a lot of head-scratching to be done in the first four sections whenever the realism gives way to yet another teasing but incomprehensible hint that dark forces are at work. Mitchell has spoken of his fondness for the "slow reveal" and "delayed gratification" that a long novel can provide. But in *The Bone Clocks*, the reveal is not so much slow as glacial—and the gratification, while undoubtedly delayed, not gratifying enough.

The book starts deceptively plainly, with fifteen-year-old Holly Sykes running away from her Kent home in 1984. By page 16, however, what she accurately refers to as "the Weird Shit" has already begun. When she was seven, Holly tells us, a beautiful blond woman called

Miss Constantin started to show up in her bedroom at night. At this stage, neither she nor the reader can possibly realize that Miss C is an Anchorite, checking out Holly's psychic powers with a view to imbibing her soul. Luckily, though, the psychiatrist that Holly's parents send her to is Dr. Marinus.

To Holly, he's just "the first Chinese person I ever met, apart from the ones at the Thousand Autumns Restaurant." To Mitchell's readers, he's manifestly a reincarnation of the Dutch surgeon from *The Thousand Autumns*, whose references to his own immortality in eighteenth-century Japan no longer seem as ambiguous as they did then.² His touch on Holly's forehead instantly banishes the visitations—although it's not until page 457 that we (sort of) know why: "I inoculated you by draining off your psychosoteric voltage and rendering you unfit for Black Wine," Marinus tells her; which, by the book's standards, is as clear as it gets.

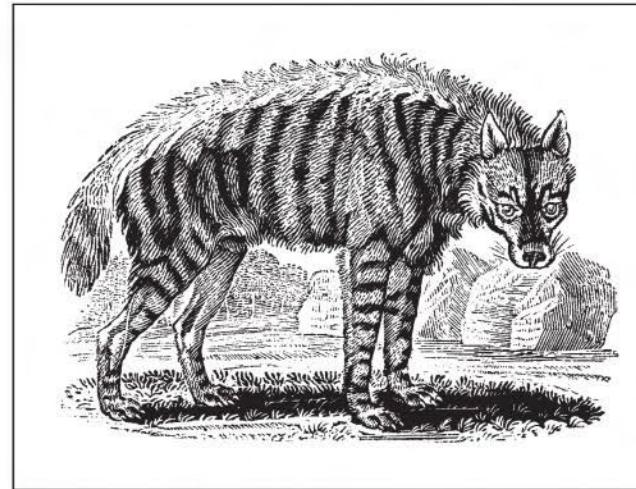
Holly's psychic powers, meanwhile, evidently remain in place. Back in 1984, she heads into the countryside where, between scenes of impeccable psychological realism and fruit-picking, she meets an old woman called Esther Little, who offers her tea in return for "asylum...if the First Mission fails." Holly also has a vision of some sort of cosmic battle in a large stone chamber with an eyeless icon and Miss Constantin pointing a silver-tipped finger. (Again, we won't know why for quite a long time.)

In section two, set in the 1990s, the narrator is Hugo Lamb, Jason's charming but dangerous London cousin from

²"Readers of [The Thousand Autumns] don't know it," Mitchell told *The Paris Review* when the novel came out, "but...he's on his twenty-eighth lifetime."

Black Swan Green, now a Cambridge undergraduate. I suspect I might not be the only reader whose heart sinks slightly when Hugo gets chatting with a blond who introduces herself as Miss Constantin and who talks in vague terms about the possibility of living forever. Fortunately, after that, he concentrates on the more entertaining business of being a complete cad in several locations, including an alpine ski resort where he meets Holly, who is working as a waitress. Faced with unfamiliar feelings of human fondness, Hugo briefly considers falling in love—before a delegation of people calling themselves Anchorites make him an offer he doesn't refuse: eternal youth in return for providing a psychic child to kill every three years.

But this raises problems in another way too. Mitchell has talked about



The Bone Clocks as his "midlife crisis novel"—with immortality the only temptation strong enough for people to enter a "Faustian pact" in which they allow their conscience to be amputated. And yet, as we've been made abundantly aware by then, Hugo never had a conscience—and neither, from what we see, did anybody else who's become an Anchorite. For such a careful writer, this seems a curious oversight, and one that robs the book of virtually all moral complexity.

On a happier note, in the next two sections the Anchorite theme takes more of a back seat. In "The Wedding Bash," Holly's war-journalist partner Ed returns from Iraq in 2004 for the wedding of her sister Sharon, where the contrast between ordinary British life and the memories of what he's seen in the war give them both a heightened, almost hallucinatory quality. We then head into the near future for a satire on the literary world, narrated by Crispin Hershey, the aging "Wild Child of British literature," whose sales and talent are in freefall as he drifts from one international writers' festival to another, frequently bumping into Holly, who has somewhat improbably published a best seller about her psychic childhood.

Mitchell has denied that Crispin is based on Martin Amis. Nonetheless, the titles of Crispin's *Desiccated Embryos* and *Red Monkey* might remind some readers of Amis's *Dead Babies* and *Yellow Dog*. And while there may be other British novelists who, like Crispin, play chess, smoke a lot, have a controversially aggressive agent with a scavenger's nickname ("the Jackal" in Amis's case, "the Hyena" in Crispin's), and so on, there really can't be many whose famous late father used to tell an anecdote about Roald Dahl that's almost word for word the same as one in Kingsley Amis's memoirs.

By this stage, in fact, the reader might wonder if *The Bone Clocks* is offering an inadvertent Faustian pact of its own. In order to enjoy the funny, stirring, touching parts, all we have to do is put up with the Anchorites stuff intruding from time to time. Out walking with his daughter, for instance, Ed has a mercifully short encounter with Miss Constantin. In 2019, Crispin bumps into a still-youthful Hugo Lamb, who appears out of nowhere to interrogate him because a story he once wrote seemed to show some knowledge of how the Anchorites operate.³ The fifth and longest novella, though, comprehensively dashes all hopes of any such compromise.

"An Horologist's Labyrinth," set in 2025, is narrated by Marinus himself, who tracks Holly down for what proves to be a final apocalyptic showdown between good and evil—but not before he's given her (and us) a belated and punishingly thorough explanation of what's been going on. The level of detail in his exposition sadly confirms that Mitchell is most interested in the book's least interesting elements, but along the way we do learn that Marinus is a Horologist—Mitchell's coinage for the kind of good "Atemporal" (i.e., immortal) who, as opposed to the evil Anchorite sort, doesn't need to kill anybody to live forever. Nobody knows why, but Horologists "inherit resurrection

as a birthright," their souls reappearing inside a naturally deceased child forty-nine days after their previous life ended. As well as retaining memories of all their past lives, Horologists can also disembody themselves and make their souls temporarily "ingress" into any mortals—which is why, unbeknownst to Holly, Marinus's fellow Horologist Esther Little has been holed up inside her since 1984, when the First Horologist Mission to destroy the Anchorites did indeed fail, and asylum was required. After digging Esther out, Marinus leads the Horologists and Holly to that Alpine Dusk Chapel for a second go at finishing off the Anchorites.

When telling Holly about the failed First Mission (of which we now realize she had her vision in chapter one), Marinus rather sheepishly confesses that "it's hard to describe a psychosoteric battle at close quarters." This, however, doesn't stop Mitchell from trying—often with the aid of the prefix "psycho." Once battle commences, we get page after page of sentences such as: "Incorporeally, I pour psychovoltage into a neurobolas and kinetic it at our assailants." Given that the Anchorites have psychobolts, psychodumdums, and psychoincendiaries at their disposal, another defeat for the Horologists initially seems a distinct possibility. Until, that is, Esther ingresses her soul into a crack in the chapel wall and detonates a blast of "psychosoteric dynamite."

The problem with all this is not merely that it's a bit silly, but that the customary exuberance of Mitchell's storytelling is replaced by something that feels more like self-consciousness, even

³One for the Mitchell obsessives: the same story was the basis of a movie the narrator watches in *Number9Dream*.

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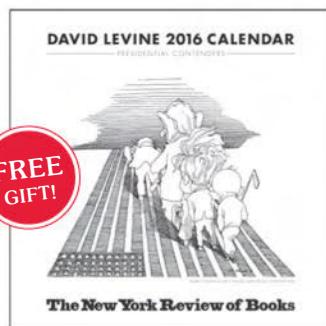
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anxiety. Although the prevailing tone is determinedly solemn, there are occasional nervous jokes that appear to acknowledge the underlying preposterousness. (“You lost me at ‘Atemporals,’” says Holly after Marinus begins his metaphysical explanation.) More than once, Mitchell seems to notice potentially tricky questions—and hastily, sometimes desperately, seeks to answer them. Why, for instance, should a supposedly indestructible chapel have such a convenient crack in it? “The Chapel was built by faith,” Esther points out. “But faith requires doubt, like matter requires antimatter. That crack, that’s the Blind Cathar’s doubt.” Meanwhile, in a particularly spectacular example of delayed gratification, on page 526 we finally discover what the novel’s title means: “bone clocks” is the Anchorites’ contemptuous nickname for people who grow old and die.

To Mitchell’s credit, the book doesn’t end with the Horologists’ great victory—on the indisputable grounds that most lives don’t have an obvious climax after which nothing happens. The year 2043 finds Holly back as the narrator and living in Ireland during what, Mitchell readers might not be surprised to hear, are postapocalyptic times. (“A writer only has a relatively small family of themes,” Mitchell has said, “and however hard you try to write about something else, they reemerge like indestructible whack-a-moles.”) As hideous dystopian futures go, this one is pretty standard: with the planet’s oil reserves running out, travel, reliable electricity, and digital communications are fading into memory. Nonetheless, the collapse is thoroughly imagined, with both the incidental details and wider implications powerfully spelled out. By concentrating on Holly and her neighbors, the chapter also restores some of her and the book’s humanity after the excesses of “An Horologist’s Labyrinth.”

But then comes a last and clinching miscalculation: the reappearance of Marinus, who, in his latest incarnation, arrives to take Holly’s granddaughter and adopted grandson to the mysteriously safe haven of Iceland. For all his dark thoughts about the ineradicable nature of human ruthlessness, Mitchell is fond of happy endings—but with the rest of humanity left to its fate and just two people saved, this feels dangerously close to the facile. More importantly, its glibness serves as a jolting reminder—and final proof—of how much the Atemporals have disfigured the book, even to the point of Animacide.

Mitchell has described his fictional method as “putting elements together that...apparently don’t belong together”—something he’s triumphantly achieved in the past. In *The Bone Clocks*, though, the failure of the human stories and the metaphysical powers to coalesce means that its self-deprecating moments (unlike in *Cloud Atlas*) have a disconcertingly accurate ring. It is, for example, hard to disagree with Crispin Hershey’s agent when Crispin says his next book will be “one-third fantasy. Half, at most.” “A book can’t be a half fantasy any more than a woman can be half pregnant,” the Hyena replies.

Oddly, this is a piece of advice that Mitchell himself appears to have taken

to heart—at least for now—in *Slade House*, an uncharacteristically slim novel that’s followed *The Bone Clocks* with surprising speed (a surprise shared by his own British publishers). The book had its origins as a short story told in tweets that Mitchell agreed to write as a means of building excitement for the publication of *The Bone Clocks*. But having found that extending it into something longer was “enormously fun to do,” he’s decided to offer the whole thing as what he calls “almost a dessert if you’ve read *The Bone Clocks*, and a starter if you haven’t, and hopefully a standalone amuse-bouche if you’re not going to.”

Slade House duly plunges us back into the world of soul-drinking baddies, this time as represented by the siblings Jonah and Norah Grayer, who’ve formed a two-person breakaway group from the Anchorites. Not for them all that complicated business with Black Wine in alpine chapels. Instead, they simply own a large house that reappears for one night every nine years in a provincial English town, and into which they lure their victims for the more straightforward kind of Animacide they require to top up their immortality—until they try the same ploy on a psychiatrist called Marinus.

Again, the metaphysics are unblushingly presented (“The operandi works provided we recharge the lacuna every nine years by luring a gullible Engifted into a suitable orison,” Norah reminds her brother at one stage). Again, the various voices, with each section narrated by one of the victims, are all pitch-perfect—from a thirteen-year-old autistic boy to a divorced middle-aged policeman. The difference from *The Bone Clocks*, though, is that Mitchell commits himself so wholeheartedly to the fantasy element that some British science-fiction fans have already taken *Slade House* as conclusive evidence that he’s now firmly one of their own.⁴

Admittedly, those of us who still prefer the playfully realistic Mitchell to the hard-core sci-fi version might wish that he’d chosen to jump the other way. Even so, the result is certainly a much more coherent novel than *The Bone Clocks*, as well as a much tauter one. Or as Mitchell’s American publisher wrote, maybe ill-advisedly, when announcing the book, “On the heels of *The Bone Clocks*, perhaps his most ambitious novel yet, [David Mitchell] has delivered *Slade House*... quite possibly his most entertaining.”

Presumably the publisher didn’t mean to suggest that the ambitiousness of *The Bone Clocks* often comes at the expense of its entertainment value (i.e., all those good tunes). Yet if he had, he wouldn’t have been far wrong.

In another of his self-deprecating moments, Mitchell told *The Paris Review* that “I used to try to make myself look clever by saying I was in search of the narrative saturation point of fiction”—and with *The Bone Clocks*, you can’t help feeling, he’s finally found it. Paradoxically, it seems, even maximalism has its limits. □

⁴And no wonder: faced with a touch-free automatic soap dispenser in 2004, a minor character in *The Bone Clocks* marvels that “life’s more science-fictiony by the day.” Mitchell’s work, meanwhile, appears to be getting more science-fictiony by the book.

What's So Great About the Greeks?

Gregory Hays

Introducing the Ancient Greeks: From Bronze Age Seafarers to Navigators of the Western Mind
by Edith Hall.
Norton, 305 pp., \$26.95

1.

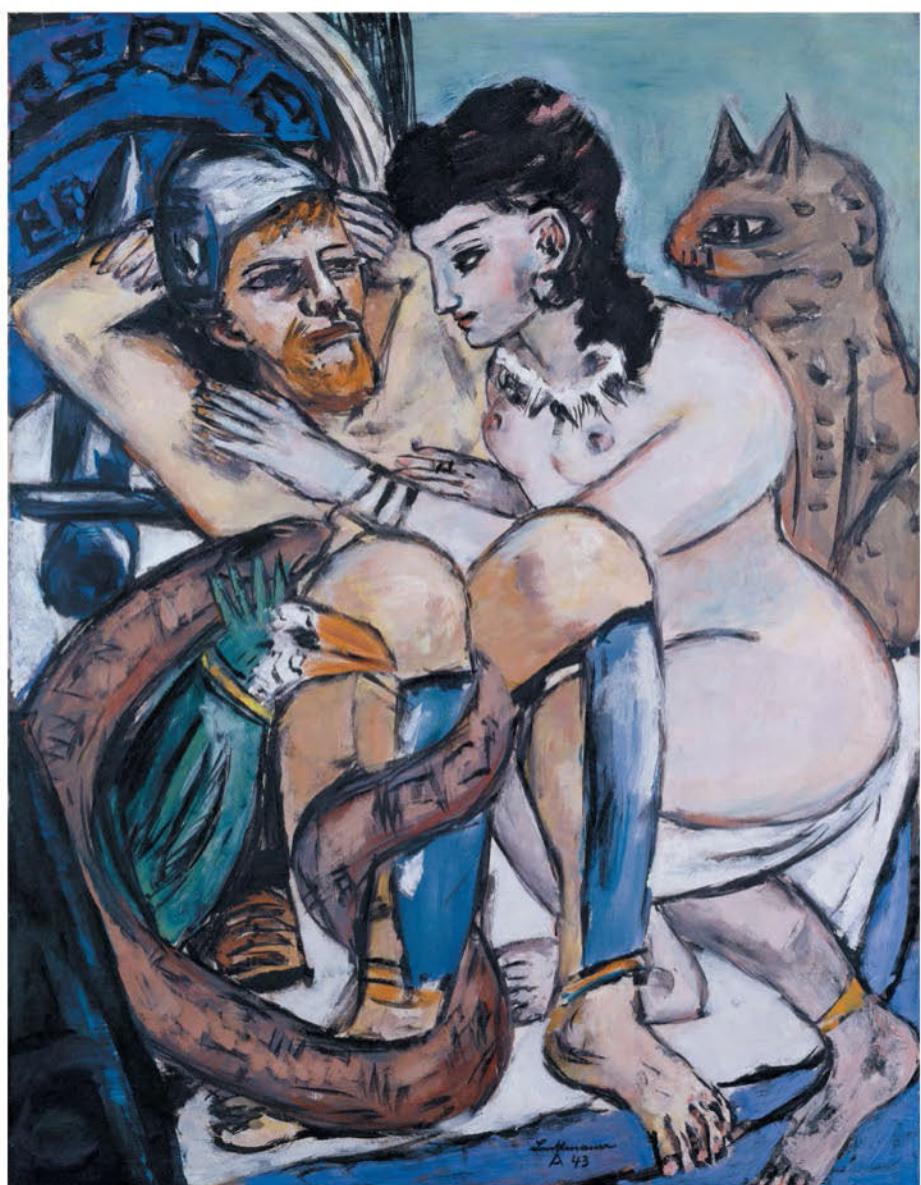
Edith Hall's *Introducing the Ancient Greeks* belongs to a familiar genre: the attempt to sum up ancient Greek civilization in two hundred pages for that elusive and mystical creature, the General Reader. The earliest recognizable example is perhaps R.W. Livingstone's *The Greek Genius and Its Meaning to Us* (1912). Livingstone was an Oxford don and future administrator (he wound up as vice-chancellor of the university), and his book had a trail of British successors: H.D.F. Kitto's *The Greeks* (1951), M.I. Finley's *The Ancient Greeks* (1963), Kenneth Dover's *The Greeks* (1980), Oliver Taplin's *Greek Fire* (1989). Each of the last three grew out of, or was designed to accompany, a television series. All are worthy contributions. Yet in readership and influence, none of this group could compete with the American Edith Hamilton.

Hamilton came from a midwestern mercantile family. Educated at Miss Porter's and Bryn Mawr, with a post-graduate stint in Munich, she spent several decades as headmistress of a private girls' school in Baltimore. After retiring in her fifties, she produced a succession of popularizing books and translations of ancient works. Generations of American students have been introduced to Greek myth by her sanitized *Mythology*. But it was her first book, *The Greek Way*, that really made her name. First published in 1930, it appeared in an expanded version in 1943. Its selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club in 1957 gave it a vast middlebrow readership, and it remains in print today.

Hamilton's view of the Greeks and her expression of it can be gauged from a passage like this one:

The Greek temple is the perfect expression of the pure intellect illumined by the spirit.... No superhuman force as in Egypt; no strange supernatural shapes as in India; the Parthenon is the home of humanity at ease, calm, ordered, sure of itself and the world. The Greeks flung a challenge to nature in the fullness of their joyous strength. They set their temples on the summit of a hill overlooking the wide sea, outlined against the circle of the sky. They would build what was more beautiful than hill and sea and sky and greater than all these.

Note the swelling tricolon ("No superhuman force...no strange supernatural shapes..."), the faint echo of John Winthrop ("temples on the summit of a hill") and the less faint one of First Corinthians ("greater than all these"): this is history as commencement address. It was Hamilton's version of Aeschylus that Robert Kennedy cited on the night of Martin Luther King's assassination:



Max Beckmann: Odysseus and Calypso, 1943

"Pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God." (Speaking without notes, and perhaps channeling his first reaction, Kennedy unconsciously substituted "despair" for Hamilton's "despite.")

Nobody since Hamilton has enjoyed quite that kind of influence. In the US, the field has largely been left to the college textbook market on the one hand and to coffee table books on the other. Perhaps the nearest recent attempt at a new Hamilton has been Thomas Cahill's *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter* (2003), a sequel to his best-selling *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (1995). It shares that book's tendency to breathless hyperbole, but is not without its virtues—not least its extensive quotations from primary sources.

Behind all these books lies the conviction that there is something special about the Greeks. No one has ever written a book called *The Phoenician Genius and Its Meaning to Us*. (Hamilton did produce a companion volume on Rome—titled, inevitably, *The Roman Way*—but one senses that her heart was not really in it.)

This continuing fascination is all the more remarkable since many achievements we tend to think of as Greek were anticipated or matched by other ancient cultures. The Babylonians predicted eclipses before Thales and

discovered the Pythagorean theorem before Pythagoras. Most of the Greek alphabet—all but the vowels—was devised by the Phoenicians. It was the Lydians, not the Greeks, who invented coinage. The divine succession myths we know from the Greek poet Hesiod's *Theogony* turn out to have Near Eastern ancestors. His *Works and Days* is a type of wisdom literature that can be found from the Euphrates to the Nile. Plato tells a story of the Athenian law-giver Solon talking genealogy with an Egyptian priest. "Solon, Solon," says the latter pityingly, "you Greeks are forever children. There is no such thing as an 'ancient' Greek."

Ah, comes the retort, but it is the Greeks, not these other peoples, who made us what we are. They gave us the alphabet! Their thoughts and discoveries still affect us today! The legacy of Greece lives on in words like "democracy," "mathematics," and "economics." (Also, of course, in "tyranny," "oligarchy," and—a later coinage—"psychopath.") That this influence is, at best, muddled and indirect, that Greek democracy was neither all that democratic nor very much like ours—this makes no difference. The Greeks will always be what Edith Hall's preface calls them, "the right people, in the right place, at the right time," as they were for the celebrity lecturer in Randall Jarrell's *Pictures from an Institution*:

There were two things he was crazy about, the thirteenth century

and Greek: if the thirteenth century had spoken Greek I believe it would have killed him not to have been alive in it.... He would say, "What do we know that Aristotle didn't know?" But he wouldn't let you tell him; it was a rhetorical question. He had diabetes and used to get an injection of insulin every day, but I don't believe he ever got one without wishing it were Galen giving it to him.

2.

Edith Hall's book is organized around a list of ten characteristics: "the ten ingredients in the recipe of Greekness." Specifically, Hall's Greeks were seagoers, suspicious of authority (her preferred word is "stroppy"), individualists, inquisitive, open to new ideas, witty, competitive, admirers of excellence, articulate, and lovers of pleasure. Each of these ten characteristics, the introduction tells us, will be paired with a period of Greek history, from the Bronze Age to the fourth century AD. These in turn correspond to ten geographical areas where Greek culture flourished, from Pylos to Ionia, Athens, and Sparta, to Macedon, Alexandria, and the Near East. The schematization is reminiscent of the table Joyce produced for the chapters in *Ulysses*, each with its assigned "organ," "symbol," and "art"—or perhaps of the permutations in a game of *Clue*. (The Macedonians, in the fourth century, with competitiveness.) Fortunately the scheme is less rigid in practice; it is the chronological division that prevails, and any of the ten characteristics can pop up almost anywhere.

The attempt to identify a canon of cultural traits is not new. Indeed, we find it already in Livingstone's *The Greek Genius*, with its chapters built around various "notes": the Note of Beauty, the Note of Freedom, the Notes of Directness and of Humanism, the Note of Sanity and Manysidedness. Contemporary readers are perhaps more likely to think of the Harvard historian Niall Ferguson's *Civilization* (2011), with its "six killer apps" that allegedly distanced "the West from the Rest."¹ Ferguson's "apps" are an odd mixture of fields of knowledge (science, medicine), legal concepts (property rights), and socioeconomic values (competition, consumerism, the Protestant work ethic). By contrast, Hall's ten characteristics are primarily traits of individuals. Can "curiosity" or "wit" really be predicated of an entire society? Hall's capacity for generalizing often makes her sound uncomfortably like a nineteenth-century historian, Francis Parkman on the Indian, say:

Ambition, revenge, envy, jealousy, are his ruling passions.... He loathes the thought of coercion;

¹Ferguson has perhaps influenced Norton's publicist: "In Hall's view, the Greeks' habit of living by the sea was their secret weapon...."

and few of his race have ever stooped to discharge a menial office. A wild love of liberty, an utter intolerance of control, lie at the basis of his character, and fire his whole existence.

This emphasis on national or ethnic character overshadows more structural factors that surely influenced Greek development. Until the Roman period Greeks combined a common language and some common institutions (their gods, the Olympics, the oracle at Delphi) with a striking lack of political unity. In this they resemble the states of Renaissance Italy or early modern Germany, and one might wonder whether that combination might be especially conducive to artistic and scientific patronage. (We think of the fifth century as the age of Athens, but Aeschylus died at the court of a Sicilian tyrant, and Euripides wrote the *Bacchae* in Macedonia.)

Hall's coverage is admirably up-to-date. Indeed, sometimes it is almost ripped from the headlines. A Mycenaean tablet found in 2011 pushes the use of written Greek back to the fifteenth century BC. A new fragment of the lyric poet Archilochus narrates a battle between the Greeks and the Trojan ally Telephus. A newly edited poem by Sappho meditates on old age and the mythological figure of Tithonus. Mummy cartonnage disgorges a sequence of epigrams by the Hellenistic poet Posidippus. And new archaeological finds contribute too. A seventh-century-BC skull from Abdera shows evidence of successful trepanning, and recent French excavations shed light on the harbor at Alexandria.

Even experienced students will find some new pieces of information: male beauty contests at Athens, a huge cache of terra-cotta masks at Sparta. Everyone knows the Macedonians exploited the phalanx formation; Hall emphasizes their use of torsion-spring catapults. And she draws attention to some less than familiar works: the fragments of the female poet Nossis, for example, or Plutarch's playful dialogue *Gryllus*, in which one of Odysseus's transformed comrades decides he prefers his animal form. Sometimes she seems overimaginative. It may be that life in Sparta "had its moments of lightheartedness and enchantment." I am less convinced that the silting-up of the Maeander estuary prompted Ionian thinkers to invent natural philosophy, or that Napoleon invaded Egypt based on boyhood reading of the Greek geographer Strabo.

Hamilton is the inspirational head-of-school, eyes fixed firmly upon the pure, the good, and the beautiful. Hall is more like the capable and energetic games mistress, brooking no back talk. "Ambivalence," we are instructed, "is the only possible response toward the Spartans of the classical period"—as if plenty of observers over the last two and a half millennia had not found them wholly admirable or thoroughly repulsive. To ancient observers the Parthenon frieze "can only have suggested the Panathenaic procession." Casual readers might wonder about that "only." What else might the frieze have suggested? As insiders will recognize, Hall is tacitly squashing Joan Breton Connelly's suggestion that it actually depicts an episode from early

Athenian myth.² No "teaching the controversy" here.

Like the Greeks themselves, Hall is quick to generalize from a handful of examples (or even just one). "The Greeks" conviction that they were the best swimmers in the world," we are told, "was a core constituent of their collective identity." How do we know this? Well, Theseus went diving for a ring, the shipwrecked Odysseus rode the waves in to shore, and during the Persian Wars a father-daughter team swam down and dislodged the anchors of enemy ships. Nor should we be surprised that the Syrian Philodemus found favor with Roman patrons: "Syrians were always skilled expositors of Greek philosophy." (Always?) "The Greeks imagined the entire universe as being constructed like an enormous trireme"—here "the Greeks" means one passage in Plato's eccentric myth of Er.

For all its novelties, this can be a strangely old-fashioned book. The treatment of early Greek poetry is reminiscent of Bruno Snell's *The Discovery of the Mind*, a book that charts the Greeks' progress in abstract reasoning through literature, but often ignores differences of genre and rates of survival. So Hall sees probabilistic reasoning as a creation of the sixth century: "Characters in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* do not argue from probability." Neither do

they eat fish, and perhaps for the same reason: it's not a very heroic thing to do. "Archilochus changed the course of poetic history by putting his own irreverent subjectivity at the heart of his songs." Did he? Or are his irreverent songs merely the first that the arrival of alphabetic writing lets us hear—as if in working our way down the radio dial we had finally hit a station with a strong signal?

The past generation has seen a dramatic reevaluation of Hellenistic literature, partly under the impetus of papyrus finds. Once dismissed as sterile academicism, it is now widely seen as a creative response to a new, multicultural world. Hall will have none of this. For her, the vogue for Hellenistic poetry is an indictment of our own time:

At the cinema, we have entered an age of nostalgia, of remakes and pastiches of old movies and television programs, as if seams of creativity have run dry. Our current obsession with recycling inherited artifacts inevitably makes us relate to the allusive, pseudo-archaic *Hymns* of Callimachus or the whimsical, gothic response to Homer in Apollonius's *Argonautica*.

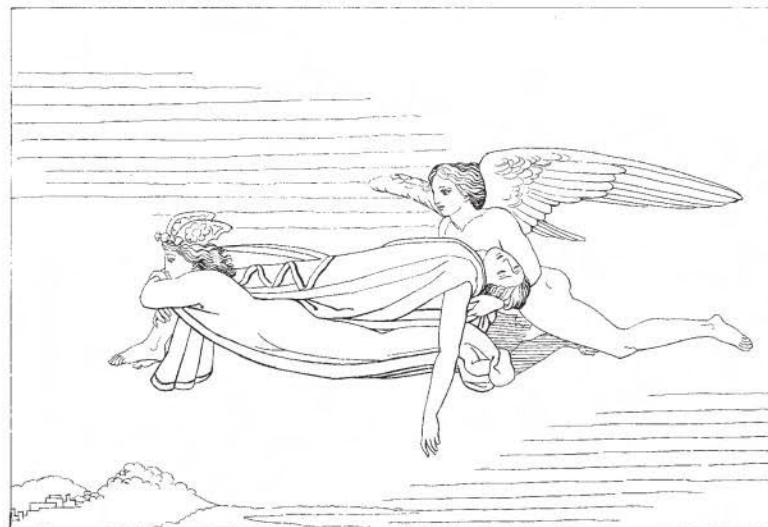
("Whimsical gothic" would be a good description of Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill, but is perhaps less satisfactory as applied to Apollonius's odd, unsettling epic.)

²See Mary Beard's review of Joan Breton Connelly's *The Parthenon Enigma* in these pages, March 6, 2014.

What really stands out, though, is the omission or downplaying of certain topics. Here again one is reminded of Livingstone:

The men who built and based Hellenism were thinkers and artists.... In so far as the Greek was enterprising, dishonest, or superstitious, we are not interested in him: for these qualities are not part of the Greek gift to Europe. We shall not discuss his Orphism, nor his Chthonian worships, nor his anthropology, nor his political failures, nor his commercial morality, nor his military efficiency, nor his attitude to barbarians, slaves, and women.

Hall credits Pericles with delivering the funeral oration Thucydides puts in his mouth, a tribute to "democratic values



'Sleep and Death Conveying the Body of Sarpedon to Lycia'; illustration by John Flaxman for Homer's Iliad, 1793

and love of liberty." (Tell it to the Melians.) We hear little of Athenian imperialism's dark side—the "shadow of the Parthenon" as Peter Green dubbed it in a 1972 essay. Little too about slavery, except that it was a prerequisite for creating "a strong definition of individual freedom."

Hall's book is well represented by its cover, which shows part of a 1904 painting, *A Libation to Olympus*, by Hugh Goldwin Rivière. The viewer is placed amidships, looking toward the bow, as a boat shoulders its way through wine-dark waves. The lofty mountain of the gods gleams white in the distance. Rowers in bright-colored garb pull at the oars, one glancing over his shoulder at the far-off peak. Beyond them, the pilot looks on as a white-haired figure raises a two-handled cup in reverent homage, a young man standing poised behind him. Here are Matthew Arnold's Greeks, "the young light-hearted Masters of the waves" (Hall quotes the passage in her epigraph). Here too are Edith Hamilton's "sailors on a sapphire sea washing enchanted islands purple in a luminous air."

But these are not the only Greeks. Less than a decade after the revised edition of *The Greek Way*, E. R. Dodds would publish his landmark study *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951). Dodds's Greeks are intimate with madness, prophecy, and ecstatic religion (including the "Chthonian worships" Livingstone found so distasteful), and their embrace of reason has to be understood against that background. This is a far cry, to be sure, from Hamilton's high-minded thinkers or Hall's agile, dolphin-like seafarers. Yet when one reads Aeschylus's *Libation-Bearers* or

the vision of the suitors in the *Odyssey*, Dodds seems a far better guide.

3.

If *Introducing the Ancient Greeks* often reads like a children's book for adults, the fault is not entirely Hall's. As Livingstone confessed, "few people could write a book on this subject, and feel satisfied with it." Yet the nagging question remains. Why do the Greeks matter? Why do we keep coming back to them? No doubt the Greeks have often provided a foil for the dreariness of one's own society, as they did for Winckelmann in the eighteenth century and Nietzsche in the nineteenth. Certainly they have served the purposes of nineteenth- (and twentieth-) century racism, bearing the West's standards against the slavish and benighted Rest. But these are only partial answers. What was it that made Petrarch struggle to parse his precious Greek manuscript of Homer? Why did Pope translate the *Iliad* rather than the *Aeneid*?

Perhaps the *Iliad* itself is part of the answer. For whatever else they did, the Greeks produced a body of written texts that, in their diversity of genres and subjects, have proved exceptionally good to think with. Like Hamilton's, Hall's book is billed as an introduction to Greek culture, but it

is primarily about Greek literature. Of Hall's ten Greek characteristics, it is "articulate" that is the prerequisite for all the others. As Horace observed, "there were valiant men before Agamemnon." But without Homer the Mycenaean shaft graves and Linear B tablets would be like the Hittite royal archives, the preserve of a handful of specialists.

But this too is not the whole story. Other ancient peoples produced literature, from the Akkadian *Gilgamesh* to the Egyptian *Dream of Nectanebo*. The texts had to be not only created but preserved and transmitted. And here only the Hebrew Bible, with its continuous tradition of interpretation, can compete with the Greeks. It is conventional to give credit to the Romans—captors captivated by their captives, a nation of stolid Watsons writing up the Greeks' adventures. But much of the credit is due to the Greeks themselves. Hall is snippy about the Alexandrian library (she thinks it "stifled experimentation"), but it had a crucial part in preserving what we have of earlier literature. Nor should one forget the Byzantine grammarians who copied and commented on what we have.

But the real unsung heroes may be the Greek rhetoricians and educators of the early centuries AD, the era referred to as the "Second Sophistic." In speeches, dialogues, biographies, and burlesques, it was they who created much of the "classical Greece" we think we know. Our image of Themistocles and Socrates owes as much to them as to Herodotus or Plato. Our Diogenes and Alexander are mostly their invention. It is their shadows that hover behind Hall's mental navigators, in all their inquisitive rivalry and pleasure-loving independence. □

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

A CURRENT LISTING



Sidney Lazarus, Light and Shade, 1951

Shepherd / W & K Galleries, 58 East 79th Street, New York, NY, 10075; (212) 861-4050; shepherdny@aol.com; www.shepherdgallery.com. Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–6pm. October 29 through December 19, 2015: "Sidney Lazarus: Fantastical and Visionary Works." We are pleased to exhibit the drawings of Sidney Lazarus (1912–1973), an American Visionary. The works in the exhibition center around his private world of fantastic imagery, culled from his life experience and the knowledge of works by his

predecessors Felicien Rops, Odilon Redon, James Ensor, Heinrich Kley, and Alfred Kubin, among others. It is interesting to note how these artists absorbed one another's visionary experiences. Lazarus is an American addition to this international group.



Erwin Lang, The Artist and His Wife, c. 1910, oil on canvas, 50 x 25 inches

Shepherd / W & K Galleries, 58 East 79th Street, New York, NY, 10075; (212) 861-4050; shepherdny@aol.com; www.shepherdgallery.com. Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–6pm. November 10–December 19, 2015: "Vienna 1910: Artist & Dancer Erwin Lang & Grete Wiesenthal." Erwin Lang (1886–1962) and Grete Wiesenthal (1885–1970) were at the center of the Viennese avant-garde in the important first decades of the twentieth century. Lang, along with Kokoschka and Schiele, exhibited in the Hagenbund. Lang also created poster, costume, and production designs for Wiesenthal's performances, which were major innovations in the world of abstract modern dance. The exhibition of Lang's important double portrait, *The Artist and His Wife*, is accompanied by a group of his woodcuts and drawings illustrating the couple's artistic cooperation.



Andrei Kushnir, Winter Vacation, oil on panel, 4 x 6 inches

American Painting Fine Art, 5118 MacArthur Blvd., NW, Washington, DC, 20016; (202) 244-3244; www.classicamericanpainting.com. Wednesday–Saturday, 11am–7pm, and by appointment. Now showing: "Small Treasures," our annual exhibition of small works in oil, acrylic, watercolor, and mixed

media by members of the Washington Society of Landscape Painters, gallery artists, and guest artists. Contact us by e-mail for a preview of the exhibit. Our gallery is dedicated to the finest work in landscape, still life, genre, urban, and marine art by current traditional American painters, many with national reputations, including recent works by Andrei Kushnir, Michele Martin Taylor, David Baise, Barbara Nuss, Michael Francis, Ross Merrill, Sara Linda Poly, Bill Schmidt, Jean Schwartz, and Carol Spils.

Swann Auction Galleries, 104 East 25th Street, New York, NY; (212) 254-4710; Upcoming Auctions: Maps & Atlases, Natural History & Color Plate Books, December 8, featuring The Mapping of America including William Faden's scarce *The North America Atlas*, 1777, and Joducus Hondius's *Historia Mundi*, 1635, preview December 3 through 8; and African-American Fine Art, December 15, including works by Romare Bearden, Barkley L. Hendricks, Norman Lewis, and Elizabeth Catlett, preview December 10 through 15. More information, including highlights and preview times, at swanngalleries.com.



Alma W. Thomas, Fall Atmosphere, acrylic on canvas, 1971. Estimate \$50,000 to \$75,000. At auction December 15.

Dowling College—Vanderbilt Mansion. Sculptural Interactions Exhibit. Oakdale, NY 11769; by appointment: manzischacht@gmail.com; www.veramanzischacht.com. September through December 2015. Natural light, terracotta, paper, gels. Esclarmonde: "to enlighten the world" (Medieval French translation). Life-sized terracotta sculpture named for the twelfth-century Countess of Foix, who was known for her wisdom, courage, spiritual life, and freedom. "The Natural Light Installation": cyclical in form, the work begins to be when the sun rises and ceases to be at dusk, and is reinitiated at dawn. Transparent gels are secured to a natural light source, creating a continuous movement of color in the Memory Palace Chamber.

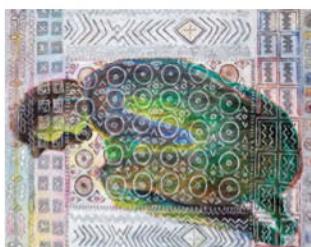


Memory Palace Chamber, Liminality and Luminosity: NEA Grant Installation. Photo: Jennifer Formica.

Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 625 Williams Street, New London, CT 06320; (860) 443-2545; www.lymanallyn.org. "Come In! Elizabeth Enders Recent Work" (on view through January 3, 2016) is an inviting look at a broad range of work by internationally recognized contemporary artist Elizabeth Enders. The exhibition, guest curated by Charlotta Kotik, Curator Emerita of Contemporary Art at the Brooklyn Museum, brings together paintings on loan from private collections, museums, and galleries in two compelling presentations of new works by an artist Kotik has called "lyrical and meditative." Real Art Ways in Hartford, CT is presenting a complementary assemblage of Enders's work during the same time period.



Elizabeth Enders, Connemara IV, series iii, 2011, watercolor on paper, 9 x 12 inches



Roslyn Fassett, Bamana Women's Cloth, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 inches

As Above/So Below, an exhibit by artist Roslyn Fassett at the Prince Street Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, New York, NY; 646-230-0246. December 1–30, open Tuesday to Saturday, 11am–6pm. Included is a series of African-inspired paintings based on layering of textile patterns. Mrs. Fassett has traveled in Mali and Nigeria studying and collecting textiles. Accent is on the concept of recurrence, an overlaying of images producing a visual echo. See: www.roslynfassettartist.com.



John Walker, Bait II, 2015, oil on canvas, 84 x 66 inches

Alexandre Gallery has moved to a new space at 724 Fifth Avenue, 4th Floor, New York, NY, 10019; (212) 755-2828; inquiries@alexandregallery.com; www.alexandregallery.com. November 3 through December 22, 2015: "John Walker: Looking Out to Sea." Exhibition will be accompanied by a 180-page fully illustrated book published by the gallery surveying fifteen years of John Walker's paintings.



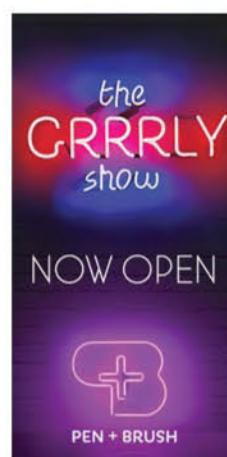
Fairfield Porter, [Ocean], c. 1972–73, ink on paper, 8 x 11 inches

The Drawing Room, 66 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY, 11937; (631) 324-5016; www.drawingroom-gallery.com. Please note our seasonal change in hours: Monday, Friday, and Saturday 10am–5pm; Sunday 11am–5pm. October 30 through December 7, 2015: "Perspectives on Land, Sea and Sky: ROBERT DASH | JANE FREILICHER | FAIRFIELD PORTER | JANE WILSON." This exhibition brings together memorable paintings and drawings inspired by the landscape of Long Island's East End by four noted American painters. Unified by their attraction to the open rural farmland they discovered in the 1950s and 1960s, the artists each adapted a distinctive visual language to express the enduring pull of land, sea, sky, and vernacular architecture. Works on view range from Fairfield Porter's sketchbook pages of the 1960s and 1970s to intimate and larger paintings by Jane Wilson, Jane Freilicher, and Robert Dash.

Arts District Center for the Arts. Opening in early 2016 at One Santa Fe, the Arts District Center for the Arts will serve the Arts District Community and downtown Los Angeles with a gallery, screening room and theater workshop space, creating opportunities for LA artists to connect with audiences and offering original, progressive programming that challenges the traditional boundaries of theater and the plastic arts. The ADCA—keeping it weird in LA! More at [www.ladadspace.org](http://ladadspace.org). Contact: jonathan@ladadspace.org, (213) 814-7164.

ARTS DISTRICT CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Pen and Brush. www.penandbrush.org/exhibitions. At Pen and Brush we believe that art and literature created by women deserves to be recognized and valued on its merit—not judged by the gender of the maker. That's why it's our mission to advocate for gender parity by creating a platform for compelling and professional work by women artists. On October 8 we unveiled "Domesticity Revisited," a revelatory show curated by Rick Kinsel, Executive Director of the Vlcek Foundation, that deals with traditional notions of domesticity that are spiritual and biographical in orientation, relating to the objects, ideas, and sensations around the theme of home.



GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

A CURRENT LISTING

If you would like to advertise a gallery or museum exhibition in **The New York Review's** Galleries & Museums Listing, please contact Oona Patrick at gallery@nybooks.com or (212) 293-1630.

How He Ruled Art

Colin B. Bailey

Paul Durand-Ruel: Memoirs of the First Impressionist Art Dealer (1831–1922)

revised, corrected, and annotated by Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel, and translated from the French by Deke Dusinberre. Flammarion, 331 pp., \$55.00

Inventing Impressionism:

Paul Durand-Ruel and the Modern Art Market

Catalog of a recent exhibition at the Musée du Luxembourg, Paris, the National Gallery, London, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, edited by Sylvie Patry, with contributions by Anne Robbins, Christopher Riopelle, Joseph J. Rishel, Jennifer A. Thompson, Anne Distel, Flavie Durand-Ruel, Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel, Dorothee Hansen, Simon Kelly, and John Zarobell. London: National Gallery, 303 pp., \$65.00 (distributed by Yale University Press)

We needed a reactionary to defend our painting, which Salon-goers said was revolutionary. Here was one person, at least, who was unlikely to be shot as a Communard!

Renoir's remark—as well as his affectionate portrait, painted in 1910—introduces Paul Durand-Ruel as the least likely champion of avant-garde French painting in the second half of the nineteenth century. “Seeing him in his eternal frock coat,” observed *Le Guide de l'amateur d'oeuvres d'art* in 1892, “you would take him for a provincial notary or a lawyer from the suburbs: punctual, methodical, and formal.” In 1943, John Rewald, a leading scholar of Impressionism, wrote, “No name of a non-artist is more closely bound up with the history of Impressionism.” While Monet, Renoir, Degas, and Pissarro are indeed household names today, Durand-Ruel remains familiar only to specialists.*

“Inventing Impressionism: Paul Durand-Ruel and the Modern Art Market”—a splendid exhibition in Paris, London, and Philadelphia this year—rehabilitated the Parisian dealer who mounted the first show of the group's work in New York in April 1886, where he soon opened his first gallery. He organized London's first blockbuster exhibition of 315 Impressionist paintings in the Grafton Galleries in January 1905. The recent exhibition and catalog are accompanied by a new edition of Durand-Ruel's *Memoirs*, written in 1911, and translated into English for the first time. Both the catalog and *Memoirs* draw extensively on the vast, miraculously intact Durand-Ruel archive, still held by descendants of his family.

*“Celui dont on ne parlait jamais sinon entre spécialistes,” from Pierre Assouline, *Grâces lui soient rendues: Paul Durand-Ruel, le marchand des impressionnistes* (Paris: Plon, 2002), p. 13. Additional footnotes appear in the Web version of this article at www.nybooks.com.



Paul Durand-Ruel in his gallery, Paris, circa 1910

Durand-Ruel & CIE

paying high prices for their paintings. Durand-Ruel and Brame purchased a group of ninety-one works by Rousseau in 1867, six months before his death, for 100,000 francs. They offered Millet an annual salary of 30,000 francs in 1866 in return for an exclusive contract (which the artist declined) and in 1872 spent nearly 400,000 francs on his pictures. Between April 1872 and February 1873 the ultra-monarchist Durand-Ruel bought, for over 94,000 francs, fifty-two paintings by the former Communard Courbet, who remained in exile following his imprisonment for the destruction of the Vendôme Column. In July 1872 he acquired Courbet's notorious *Return from the Fair* (1863; whereabouts unknown, presumed destroyed)—a monumental canvas, rejected even from the Salon des Refusés of that year for its rampant anticlericalism. (It showed a group of drunken clerics making their way home after one of their weekly lunches.) Durand-Ruel paid 10,000 francs for the picture, and sold it the next day for a profit of 50 percent.

Durand-Ruel was also avid for the work of younger artists, including returning Prix de Rome winners whom he visited in their studios, and emerging Salon painters whose reputations remained to be established. He was an early patron of Léon Bonnat (1833–1922), whose *Neapolitan Peasants in Front of the Palazzo Farnese* he acquired at the Salon of 1866 for 10,000 francs. He paid even more—16,000 francs—for the twenty-seven-year-old Henri Regnault's life-sized *Salomé* (Metropolitan Museum of Art), one of the sensations of the Salon of 1870. For comparison, it is worth recalling that Manet's *Olympia* of 1863 (Musée d'Orsay), the scandal of the Salon of 1865 and unsold during the artist's lifetime, was withdrawn from his estate sale of February 1884 when it failed to reach its reserve of 10,000 francs.

During the 1860s, Manet and his “school” had made not the slightest impression on this rising dealer of modern art. It was only after the family's flight from Paris during the Franco-Prussian War, when Durand-Ruel installed his wife and five children in the Périgord and boarded the last train to London on September 8, 1870 (taking his pictures with him), that he met the expatriate artists Monet and Pissarro. In 1871 he acquired work by them for very modest sums: two hundred francs for Pissarro's landscapes, three hundred francs for Monet's.

Following Durand-Ruel's return to Paris at the end of September 1871, in November his wife, Eva Lafon, pregnant with their sixth child, died of an embolism. Following this tragedy, in January 1872 he was introduced to Manet's painting by the Belgian artist Alfred Stevens, from whom he acquired *Moonlight at the Port of Boulogne* (1868; Musée d'Orsay) and *The Salmon* (1869; Shelburne Museum). “I frankly admit that up to that point I had never seriously looked at Manet's work,” Durand-Ruel recalled forty years later. “Dazzled by my purchase—because you never truly appreciate a work of art unless you own

Paul-Marie-Joseph Durand-Ruel (1831–1922) was a devout Catholic who attended mass every day and an ardent monarchist who advertised his support for the Bourbon pretender to the throne in October 1873. His sons were educated at the new Jesuit school of Saint-Ignace on the rue de Madrid; his daughters at the Couvent de Roule on the Avenue Hoche, founded in 1820. Bitterly opposed to the Third Republic's secular education policy, Durand-Ruel was arrested in 1880 for protesting the government's suppression of the male religious orders. (“It was important that all my children received not just a good education but also a Christian upbringing that concurred with the way I and my entire family felt.”)

Edmond de Goncourt, who visited his vast apartment on the rue de Rome in June 1892, was struck by the crucifix affixed to the head of his bed. It is also likely that Durand-Ruel shared the virulent anti-Dreyfusard sentiments of Degas and Renoir, although his ultra-conservative opinions did not prevent him from establishing close (and enduring) professional relations with the ardent republican Monet or the anarchist sympathizer Pissarro.

The only son of a clerk in an art supplies store, he married the proprietor's daughter and gradually transformed her family's business into an elegant gallery on the rue de la Paix that specialized in modern art. (His father became the principal dealer in the work of William Adolphe Bouguereau between 1855 and 1865.)

Late in life, Paul Durand-Ruel confided to the critic Félix Fénéon that he “detested business and dreamt only of becoming an army officer or a missionary.” He had passed the entrance exams for Saint-Cyr, the French military acad-

emy, in October 1851, was accepted into the 20th light-infantry regiment, but seems to have had a change of heart when required to sign up for seven years. Instead he went to work selling art. He had, he later said, an intense experience when he saw the thirty-five paintings by Eugène Delacroix on view at the Exposition Universelle in 1855. He wrote in his memoirs that he was suddenly struck by “the triumph of modern art over academic art.”

He first acted as an expert—the dealer on hand and ready to answer questions—at a sale of modern paintings in April 1863, at which a critic for the *Chronique des Arts* described him as “a most affable and attentive young man.” Affability remained one of his defining qualities, as the art critic Arsène Alexandre discovered when he interviewed the eighty-year-old Durand-Ruel for the German literary magazine *Pan* in 1911. But as Alexandre also noted, mild manners and courtesy masked “an unshakeable obstinacy, an iron will, though not a violent one, that achieves its ends with a smile.”

Like his father, Paul Durand-Ruel was, aside from Delacroix, initially drawn to the Romantics and the Barbizon painters, to whom he referred as “*la belle école de 1830*”: these included the landscapists Camille Corot, Théodore Rousseau, Narcisse Diaz, Jules Dupré, and Charles Daubigny; and the “realists” Jean-François Millet and Gustave Courbet, painters of “nature,” including human and animal figures.

Between 1866 and 1872 he and his business partner, Hector Brame, a former actor, sought to establish a monopoly of these artists' production by

it and live with it—the very next day I went to Manet's and bought, on the spot, everything I found there."

As he had done with the previous generation of artists, Durand-Ruel attempted to establish retroactively a monopoly of Manet's work. It was also in 1872 that he made his first purchases of landscapes by Renoir and Sisley, flower paintings by Fantin-Latour, and ballet scenes by Degas. In keeping with the official hierarchy of genres observed in the Paris art world—despised by the dealer and the Impressionists alike—paintings of subjects such as Degas's dancers sold for far higher sums than landscapes or still lifes. In January

Furthermore, Durand-Ruel was burdened by debt, having borrowed at usurious rates since 1869. Thus, after fairly modest acquisitions of the New Painting, between 1875 and 1880 he stopped buying new work directly from any of the Impressionists altogether. He lent only two paintings by Sisley to the first Impressionist exhibition, held at Nadar's photography studio in April 1874, although he bought, very cheaply, eighteen pictures at the first (and disastrous) Impressionist auction in 1875. He rented—rather than donated—three rooms of his premises to the Impressionists for their second exhibition in March

and has taken a large number of my paintings and watercolors. He has proposed to take whatever I paint. This offers me tranquility for the foreseeable future, and the means to make important work.

Similar agreements with Monet and Renoir followed, allowing the latter to travel abroad for the first time in his life. An embittered Gauguin noted in the summer of 1881 that "at the rate that Durand-Ruel is going with Sisley and Monet, who are steaming away with their pictures, he will soon have four hundred that he will not be able to get rid of."

Despite this replenishing of his stock of Impressionist paintings, Durand-Ruel's recovery was short-lived. In January 1882 the Union Générale Bank suspended payments to many people from whom it had borrowed money. This led to the collapse of the stock exchange and the sentencing of Feder and Bontoux to five years in prison. Durand-Ruel was obliged to sublet his premises yet again—this time to the Banque de Paris—and the financial crisis inaugurated, as he put it in his memoirs, "another four or five dreadful years" for his business.

But by then his commitment to the Impressionists was unquestioned, if still not profitable. In March 1882 he was the major contributor to the seventh Impressionist group exhibition on the rue Saint-Honoré, with the large number of works on display by Pissarro, Monet, Sisley, and Renoir all belonging to him. The artists themselves were by now skeptical of such undertakings. Pissarro had to convince Monet to participate: "For Durand and even for us, this exhibition is a necessity."

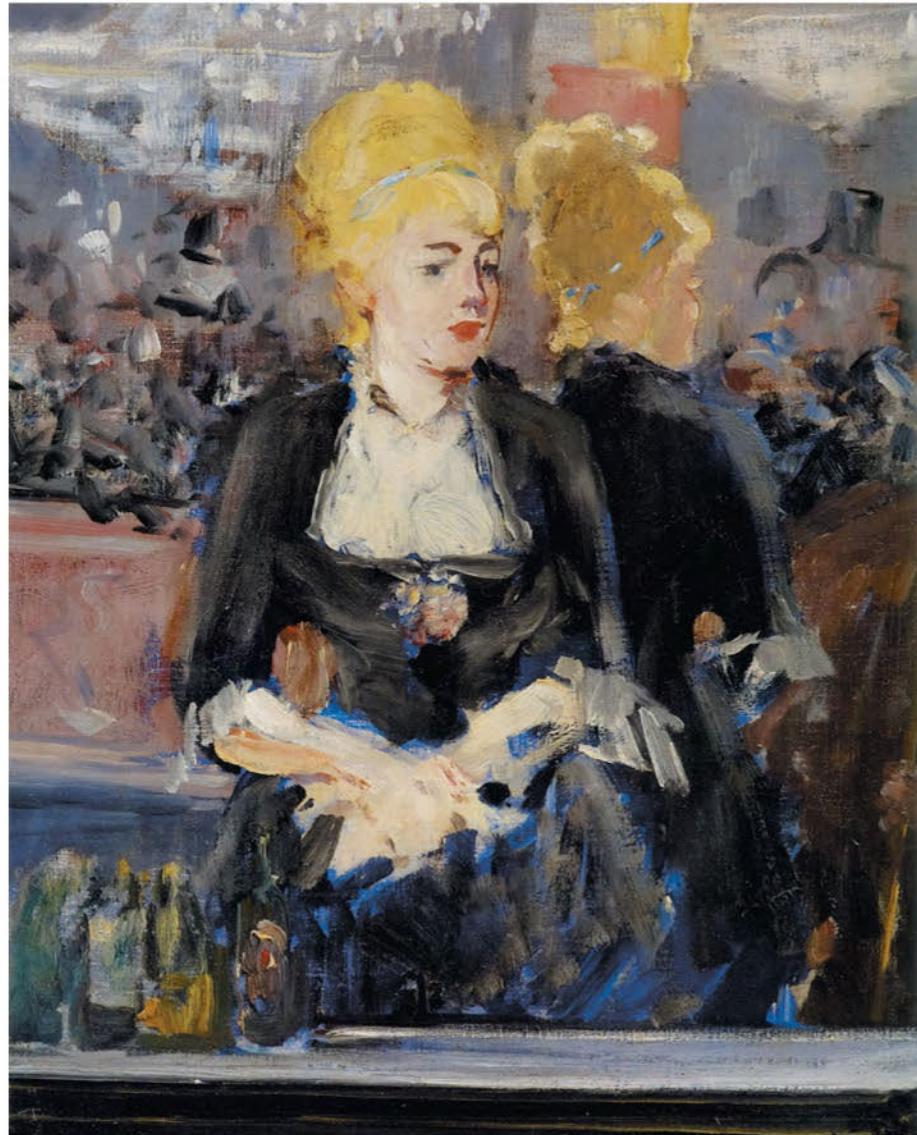
Renoir, recovering from pneumonia in L'Estaque, was determined to boycott such group shows in favor of the official Salon but reluctantly conceded that Durand-Ruel was free to exhibit paintings from his own holdings: "You may include any canvases in your possession without my authorization; they belong to you." Toward the end of the year, Durand-Ruel refurbished a spacious mezzanine apartment on the Boulevard de la Madeleine, in preparation for five shows to be devoted to Boudin, Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, and Sisley respectively between February and June 1883. As the historian Sylvie Patry has pointed out, this series of mid-career retrospectives took place when Durand-Ruel himself had little money, and long after his financial backing had disappeared.

Durand-Ruel was willing to take large risks and marketing Impressionism remained a risky business throughout the 1880s. Embroiled in an ugly dispute over the sale of a forged Daubigny, in November 1885 he justified his actions in the press, ending with an uncharacteristically emotional defense of his support of the New Painting:

The dealer's fortunes revived only in the winter of 1880 after an infusion of capital from Jules Feder, director of the Union Générale Bank founded in Lyons in 1875 by Catholic monarchists and reestablished in October 1878 under the ownership of Paul Eugène Bontoux, former *chef de service* at the Banque Rothschild. In December 1880 Durand-Ruel resumed purchasing from Boudin, Pissarro, and Sisley, insisting that he represent them exclusively. "You cannot imagine how happy I am," Pissarro informed a niece in January 1881.

Durand-Ruel, one of the great Parisian dealers, came to see me

Private Collection

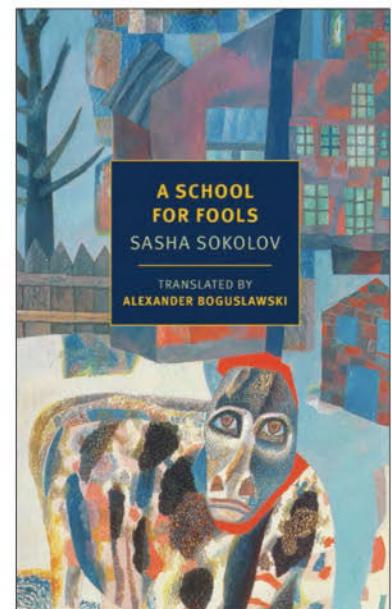


Édouard Manet: *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (detail), 1881

1872, Durand-Ruel paid Degas 1,500 francs for *The Ballet from "Robert le Diable"* (1871; Metropolitan Museum of Art). For Renoir's early masterpiece *The Pont des Arts* (1867; Norton Simon Museum)—his first purchase from the artist, in March of that year—he paid only two hundred francs.

Still, during the 1870s Durand-Ruel had only a marginal part in the emergence of Impressionism and the New Painting; he remained committed above all to the aging Barbizon painters and the *belle école* of 1830. In fact, it was not until the 1890s that prices for Impressionist painting would rise to the level of mainstream contemporary French art. In the 1870s Durand-Ruel overextended the firm, opened branches in London and Brussels (which he was forced to close in 1875), acquired collections that would be auctioned under their proprietor's names with guarantees far beyond the actual bids, and established limited stock partnerships with investors who lost half their capital. Such strategies are familiar in today's overheated market for contemporary art.

Lyrical and philosophical, witty and baffling, *A School for Fools* confounds all expectations of the novel.



In *A School for Fools* we find not one reliable narrator but two "unreliable" narrators: the young man who is a student at the "school for fools" and his double.

What begins as a reverie (with frequent interruptions) comes to seem a sort of fairy-tale quest not for gold or marriage but for self-knowledge. The currents of consciousness running through the novel are passionate and profound. Memories of childhood summers at the dacha are contemporaneous with the present, the dead are alive, and the beloved is present in the wind.

Here is a tale either of madness or of the life of the imagination in conversation with reason, straining at the limits of language; in the words of Vladimir Nabokov, 'an enchanting, tragic, and touching book.'

"Sokolov's *A School for Fools* should be considered one of the finest 20th-century Russian novels."
—Harvey Pekar, *The Washington Post*

"If Joyce had written the last chapter of *Ulysses* in Russian it would have sounded like this."
—Vladimir Markov

"Sokolov is one of those rare novelists whose primary concern is the praise and exploration of a language rather than the development of a position. In this, he is in the line of Gogol, Lermontov, Nabokov. 'For me, the Bible says it: The Word is God,' Sokolov says, 'and God is more important than life.'" —David Remnick, *The Washington Post*

"[*A School for Fools*] will undoubtedly come to be recognized as one of the great classics of Russian prose." —Newsweek

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collectors are beginning to agree, though not all share my opinion.

Perhaps Durand-Ruel's greatest coup was to organize the first group show in New York—"Works in Oil and Pastel by the Impressionists of Paris"—which opened on April 10, 1886, at the American Art Association at 6 East 23rd Street and then moved uptown to the National Academy of Design the following month. This was the result of intense planning and lobbying. In the summer of 1885 Durand-Ruel had accepted an invitation from James F. Sutton—head of the recently incorporated American Art Association and son-in-law of the founder of Macy's department store—to exhibit 289 paintings and pastels in New York. Crucially, Sutton arranged for the "duty-free importation of pictures and objets d'art to be shown in its galleries," and paid Durand-Ruel's transport and insurance costs. Import duty at 30 percent would be paid on any art that was sold.

Predictably, most of the Impressionists were skeptical. Monet confided his "regret" to the dealer at seeing "certain of these pictures...sent to the land of the Yankees." Renoir was of similar mind: "I can assure you that I am far from believing in America as the solution." Nevertheless, on March 25, 1886, Durand-Ruel arrived in New York accompanied by his twenty-one-year-old son Charles and forty-three cases of paintings and pastels valued at \$81,799. (Between 1886 and 1898 Durand-Ruel would visit New York nine times.) The exhibition opened in the second week of April, a month before wealthy New Yorkers left the city for the summer, and was deemed a relative commercial and critical success, with forty-nine paintings selling for an estimated \$40,000.

Returning from New York in mid-July, Durand-Ruel was already determined to repeat the experience. "Don't take the Americans for savages," he told Fantin-Latour, whom he was encouraging to participate in his next exhibition: "On the contrary, they are less ignorant and less hidebound than our French collectors. Paintings that took twenty years to gain acceptance in Paris met with great success there."

In the end, organizing the second Impressionist show in New York founded on the resistance of the city's own art dealers, who protested the duty-free importation of works of art. Nearly three hundred paintings, sent across the Atlantic in October 1886, remained in customs until an arrangement was reached whereby Durand-Ruel was allowed exemption on works that did not belong to him but was obliged to pay import duties on those that did. As a result, the exhibition of 223 "Celebrated Paintings by Great French Masters" did not open at the National Academy of Design until May 25, 1887, "much too late to do business," he recalled bitterly many years later. This imbroglio convinced Durand-Ruel to establish a permanent gallery in New York and to keep a portion of his stock there. During the next decade, the firm also did business with galleries in the principal East Coast cities, as well as Chicago and Pittsburgh.

By the mid-1880s, some of the leading American collectors had been regularly coming to Paris to buy modern painting: "*l'arrivée des Américains*" in May was part of the annual season. In *L'Oeuvre*, his novel about the art world published in 1886, Zola created the character of the ruthless and glamorous Naudet, "a dealer who for some years had revolutionized the business of selling pictures" and is interested above all in satisfying his American clients. Naudet "waited for May and the arrival of those American art lovers to whom he sold works for 50,000 francs that he had purchased for 10,000 francs."

of them—a matter of moral, rather than legal, contracts. Despite the precariousness of the market for Impressionist painting, Monet, Pissarro, and Sisley each resisted such a monopoly, going so far as to "revoke" their agreements with him in December 1885. As late as 1892, Durand-Ruel was still insisting upon this type of arrangement. To Pissarro, from whom he had just purchased forty-two paintings, he pleaded:

Only with the monopoly that I am requesting from you can I successfully campaign—and that is how the value of pictures is always es-

in their later, prosperous years, readily acknowledged their debt to Durand-Ruel—Monet confided to the dealer René Gimpel that "he alone had made it possible for me to eat when I was hungry"—their relationship with him remained quite formal and business-like. They expected him to perform a number of services, chiefly financial, such as paying rents, renewing insurance policies, and taking care of charitable donations. Louise Havemeyer, the great American collector of Impressionism, remarked that "Degas looked upon Durand-Ruel as upon a bank account."

Yet with longevity came loyalty and respect. Degas and Puvis de Chavannes appeared as witnesses at the weddings of Durand-Ruel's two daughters (in May and September 1893), and at that of his eldest son, Joseph, in September 1896. Renoir asked Durand-Ruel's youngest son, Georges, to be the godfather to Jean—the future filmmaker—who was christened in the summer of 1895.

Despite his unwavering attachment to several of the founding fathers of Impressionism, Durand-Ruel was less than wholehearted in his admiration for Cézanne, whose reputation he considered "terribly overrated." He complained to Renoir in April 1908 of "those fools who claim that there are only three great masters, Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh, and who have unfortunately succeeded in mystifying the public accordingly." And while his gallery was the first to show works by Gauguin (November 1893), Redon (March 1894), and Bonnard (January 1896), his interest in the Neo-Impressionists and Postimpressionists was negligible compared to his support for the somewhat tepid Impressionism of Albert André, Georges d'Espagnat, and Maxime Mauffra.

In a passage from his *Memoirs*, the dealer recognized how Impressionism, this new and truly radical art, had struggled to impose itself, a transformation that had taken place during his lifetime:

Time has done its work, and perhaps the colors have softened somewhat, but above all the eyes of the staunchest detractors have become accustomed to these refined, delicate visions of nature that they had not been able to see themselves when strolling through the countryside, and that very few artists troubled to study or sought to convey. Thus they are amazed when they are reminded of their earlier unfairness, when it is pointed out to them that the paintings they admire today are the very ones they formerly found dreadful, that made them stagger with laughter.

Along with such acute observations about changing taste, what emerges from the story of Durand-Ruel is the way that dealing in contemporary art became a huge, sometimes risky, but immensely profitable business. Very little that takes place in the market for contemporary art today was not anticipated in the career of Durand-Ruel. □



Henri Fantin-Latour: A Studio at Les Batignolles, 1870. From left to right: Otto Schölderer, Édouard Manet, Auguste Renoir, Zacharie Astruc, Émile Zola, Edmond Maître, Frédéric Bazille, and Claude Monet.

In preparing *L'Oeuvre* during the spring of 1885, Zola had been helped by the painter Antoine Guillemet (1843–1918), who had modeled for Manet in *Le Balcon* (1868; Musée d'Orsay) and who now provided short essays on a number of dealers, Durand-Ruel included. While competitors such as Georges Petit and Charles Sedelmeyer had already established extremely profitable relationships with visiting American collectors, Durand-Ruel had been unable to do so—according to Guillemet—because of his "obsession with the Impressionists."

He is crazy for Monet, persists in buying his work in the hope that he will sell it one day.... He puts all his money and all the money that he can find into justifying this conviction.... He is a black hole for all the sketches that Monet offers him. And Monet angry at Pissarro, Sisley and the others, complaining "Would that I were the only one!"

With Impressionism still a marginal and contested movement, it was Durand-Ruel's originality—and genius—to risk exporting blockbuster-scale shows to New York and establishing a permanent presence in the city.

Like Zola's Naudet, who puts the painter Fargerolles under contract and insists that "from now on, you will work only for me," Durand-Ruel expected the Impressionists to continue to accept his exclusive representation

established.... It is only because I hold all Renoir's paintings that I have finally managed to get him to the rank he deserves.... I need your promise not to sell to other dealers, even at higher prices.

Having established the markets for the Impressionists in Europe and the US—both by private buyers and museums (the latter only after the greatest resistance)—Durand-Ruel was increasingly disappointed by artists who would not grant him a monopoly. He was also by now an extremely rich man. After hearing him complain about never having made any money in selling pictures, Renoir is said to have shot back—"And how did you make your money? I don't know of any other business that you have."

The editors of Durand-Ruel's *Memoirs* estimate that he acquired over 12,000 paintings during a fifty-year career, including approximately 1,500 paintings by Renoir, one thousand by Monet, eight hundred by Pissarro, four hundred by Degas and Sisley, and two hundred by Manet. No single exhibition or catalog could hope to represent such activity comprehensively, yet the choice of works and their installation in both London and Philadelphia admirably evoked the strategies that Durand-Ruel employed in securing Impressionism's uncertain ascendancy.

While many of the Impressionists,

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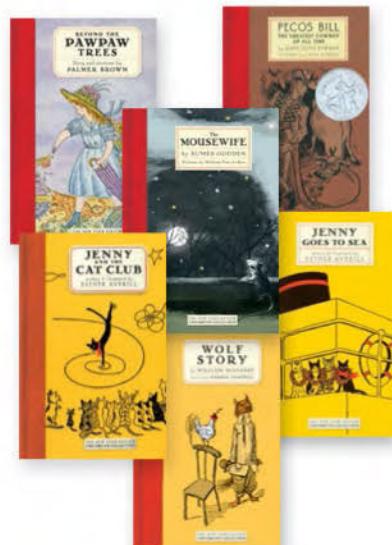


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The New Financial Order—Until It Collapsed

Roger Lowenstein

The Summit: Bretton Woods, 1944: J. M. Keynes and the Reshaping of the Global Economy

by Ed Conway.
Pegasus, 453 pp., \$28.95

The world's monetary system moves from tumult to tumult. Europe's economy is stagnant and menaced with deflation. Greece has flirted both with leaving the euro and with default. America's economy has fallen into a discouraging pattern of hopeful growth spurts followed by dispiriting slowdowns. Such turmoil has played havoc with world currencies. Late last year, the value of the euro crashed. Earlier this year, the cautious Swiss stunned traders by freeing their currency, permitting it to soar against the euro and raising—sharply—the price of its chocolates and ski chalets for people from Lisbon to Rome. Such volatility has lately been increasing. If, as the Harvard political scientist Jeffry Frieden has asserted, “the exchange rate is the single most important price in any economy, for it affects all other prices,” then global economies have rarely looked so unstable.¹

Lately, the instability has spread to Asia. Since 2012, the Japanese yen has lost nearly a third of its value. This has enhanced the competitiveness of Japanese products, putting pressure on its Asian neighbors. China's economy—in recent years the biggest contributor to the world's growth—is rapidly decelerating. In August, China stunned markets by devaluing its currency. As for the US, the dollar has risen sharply against the euro and other currencies, but this rise has put America's fragile recovery in jeopardy, by rendering its manufactured products less affordable overseas. And it has spelled bankruptcy for some of the foreign firms that borrowed in dollars (now too expensive for them to repay). A certain amount of gyration among currencies is normal, of course; that is what currencies do. But the instability has been alarming to traders, businesses, and statesmen.

Since the financial crisis, individual banks have been subject to a welter of new laws and regulations, but not so the international monetary system in which they operate. This system serves as a conducting rod for transmitting local disturbances around the globe. Even this metaphor presumes too much, for the international monetary “system” is, in fact, not a system at all. Its various pieces are simply too disjointed. America and most countries in the West permit capital to freely cross their borders. But China, the most important emerging power, tightly controls the movement of capital.

If, say, Coca-Cola wants to build a factory in China, it must apply to the government to exchange dollars for local renminbi. Many other emerging countries maintain weaker, or periodic, capital controls. Some allow their currencies to float; others “peg” them to the euro or the dollar. Switzerland maintained such a peg—until, in January, it didn't. The dollar is the lynchpin—the usual standard for other currencies

and for international trade. However, no agreement or formal convention assures the dollar of its pivotal role. Most nations keep most of their reserves—the assets they hold to make international payments, such as on their debts and trade—in dollars but they could, if they wanted, abandon the dollar tomorrow.

Persistent financial turmoil has led to demands for reform or reinvention of this ad hoc system from advocates such as Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel laureate economist, George Soros, the investor, and Zhou Xiaochuan, the long-serving governor of the People's Bank of China (the central bank). Not surprisingly, it has also reawakened interest in the one period when exchange rates, rather than being left to the caprice of events, were governed by international agreement. Roughly from the end of World War II until the early 1970s, the world's currencies were locked at fixed rates of exchange to the dollar, which served as the reserve currency, interchangeable with all others. This was the so-called Bretton Woods system, named for the mountainous retreat in New Hampshire where, in the summer of 1944, forty-four Allied nations convened to hammer out a monetary agreement.

Bretton Woods was a response to a problem that bedeviled international markets in the 1930s and bedevils them today. To put the problem simply, some countries are likely to produce more efficiently and compete more effectively, and thus to accumulate a trade surplus; others, perforce, will run deficits. Importing nations can paper over these deficits by borrowing, but in a world in which capital is free to move from country to country, speculators may sooner or later provoke a run on their currencies. Eventually, the pressure for adjustment becomes intense.

One solution is for deficit nations to raise interest rates, which will lure capital home. But high interest rates, while they may be a remedy for the currency imbalance, can be painful to the domestic economy and cause recessions. Alternatively, deficit countries can devalue their currencies, which will discourage imports and encourage exports. But devaluations destabilize entire sectors of the economy that depend (or whose raw materials depend) on trade. Moreover, when one country devalues, others often follow. To avoid this trap, countries have experimented with various forms of controls.

Bretton Woods was an attempt at collective controls. For the quarter-century that it lasted, it was also a marked success. Under Bretton Woods, the world's economic output rose at an annual rate of 2.8 percent, well above the 1.8 percent registered from the early 1970s until the 2008 financial crisis. And while the epoch of the gold standard during the late nine-

teenth and early twentieth centuries is reverently invoked by free-market purists, growth under the managed system of Bretton Woods was twice as swift.²

What's more, under Bretton Woods, capital imbalances among nations were relatively muted and banking crises were rare, as were defaults by countries on “sovereign debts”—the money borrowed directly by governments. During the Bretton Woods period, inflation was high, but standards of living rose around the globe. Banking represented a far smaller share of economic output than

to the British Empire-dominated gold standard which collapsed in 1914, through to the flimsy system of currencies and rules erected after the Great Depression in the 1930s. All previous efforts to achieve what the delegates were attempting had failed, without exception.

The delegates were motivated to reach agreement, as Conway emphasizes to good effect, because they were all aware of prior failures, notably the Versailles conference after World War I. They were laboring not just to create a new financial order but to prevent another depression and another world war. This was especially true of the conference's stars, England's celebrated economist John Maynard Keynes and the American assistant treasury secretary, Harry Dexter White.



US Assistant Treasury Secretary Harry Dexter White and the British economist John Maynard Keynes at the inaugural meeting of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's board of governors, Savannah, Georgia, March 1946

in the freewheeling financial climate that has prevailed lately, and inequality was less pronounced. If Bretton Woods cannot claim credit for all of these conditions, it was part of an architecture of financial regulation that, since the 1970s, has been relentlessly dismantled.

Why did Bretton Woods succeed, at least for a time, and does it suggest a prescription for would-be reformers today? The Bretton Woods agreement was cobbled together in July 1944, barely a month after the Allied landings in Normandy, when seven hundred delegates crammed into an aging and hurriedly refurbished hotel. The delegates, many of whom did not share a common language, worked unceasingly for three weeks and—while drinking copious quantities of alcohol—ratified a plan to manage the currencies of the world. “No one had ever successfully modified the international monetary system,” Ed Conway relates in his sweeping account, *The Summit: Bretton Woods, 1944*. “Instead,” in prior epochs,

it had evolved incrementally—from the early days of mercantilism

²See Ed Conway, *The Summit: The Biggest Battle of the Second World War—Fought Behind Closed Doors* (Little, Brown, 2014), p. 388.

³Council on Foreign Relations/Princeton University Press, 2013; reviewed in these pages by Robert Skidelsky, January 9, 2014.

¹Currency Politics: The Political Economy of Exchange Rate Policy (Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 1.

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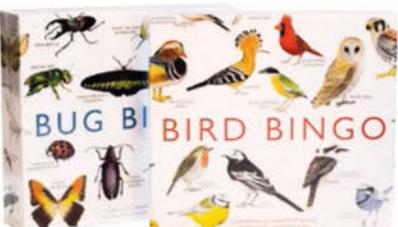
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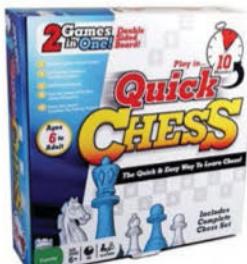


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provides some details not often found in monetary histories, quoting a letter in which the devoted Lydia professes to Keynes, "I lick you tenderly."

If White, nine years younger than Keynes, was hardly so bohemian, his rise was more improbable. The son of a Boston hardware store owner, raised with progressive sympathies, he took an interest in politics and chose to study economics, including the socialist economics of Russia. At age forty-two he left a dim career in academia for a job at the Treasury, where he quickly became the right-hand man of Roosevelt's treasury secretary, Henry Morgenthau Jr. Round-faced and a foot shorter than Keynes, he was brilliant and also unpleasant. Keynes found White to be "over-bearing...aesthetically oppressive in mind and manner." Nonetheless, he recognized that White was an innovative thinker who could distill economics with clarity. He also cited his "high integrity."

Each man wanted to do away with the wild currency swings that destabilized Europe's democracies and poisoned international relations in the 1930s. Keynes was also keen on eliminating the gold standard. Before World War I, and in some nations after it, countries pledged to redeem their currencies in gold; nations that ran short were often forced to curtail employment and growth. In the interwar period in Britain, allegiance to the gold standard provoked a severe recession. Although Keynes objected on philosophical grounds to hitching national economies to the vagaries of gold supplies, his crusade was also stiffened by national interest. The war with Nazi Germany rapidly emptied Britain of what little gold it had. As early as 1940, Conway relates, the British ambassador cheerfully told reporters in New York, "Well boys, Britain's broke; it's your money we want."

Early in the war, Keynes proposed an international bank, which he termed a Clearing Union, to regulate global finance in the postwar world. This bank would issue a new currency (dubbed "bancor") that would gradually replace gold in international finance—a shrewd proposal, since most of the world's gold by then was in America. Nations that ran short of currency could borrow from the Clearing Union; just as importantly, the Clearing Union would penalize countries that had a trade surplus and accumulated too much currency. The genius of this scheme was its symmetry. During the 1930s, Keynes observed, the process of adjustment was "*compulsory* for the debtor and *voluntary* for the creditor." In other words, importing nations, as they ran short of foreign exchange, had no choice but to curb their imports or to devalue, while exporting nations could run up surpluses forever. Britain in particular suffered, since its industry was uncompetitive. It needed—and during the war Keynes earnestly sought—protection from cheaper foreign goods.

America, though, refused to offer such protection. As the world's biggest producer it had no interest in restraining exports. This is an irony—more fully teased out by Steil—given that, today, America runs a persistent trade deficit, and habitually complains that exporters such as China tilt the scales by depressing their currencies and so achieve higher sales abroad. Keynes's plan would have solved all that. But Keynes and Britain were in no position to bargain.

White had also worked up a plan, which he finished several months after Pearl Harbor. Although the two plans agreed on much, including fixed exchange rates, White's prescription, Conway notes, would "ensure that the outgoing superpower [i.e., the UK] would be shuffled even further from centre stage." After a period of Anglo-American negotiations, Morgenthau and White issued general invitations to the Allied nations to attend a conference on the international economy. Conway vividly conveys the chaos at Bretton Woods, which Keynes likened to a "monkeyhouse"—journalists snoozing on chairs, Russians drinking with everyone and negotiating with no one.

There was a secret drama shadowing White, who in the late 1930s and apparently in the early 1940s regularly provided confidential information to Soviet couriers, including Whittaker Chambers, who relayed his information to Moscow. Decades later, a Senate commission would conclude that White's complicity in espionage "seems settled." Steil generally endorses this conclusion; Conway is more equivocal. He notes that the Soviets were then America's ally, and finds no evidence that White was a Communist. He simply believed, Conway argues, that after the war Soviet-American cooperation would be vital to peace, and desperately wanted the Russians to be a part of the new order. Conway's view may be generous, but White's ties to Moscow are tangential to his work at Bretton Woods. In both Steil's and Conway's judgment, White emphatically pursued American interests there. (He did obtain generous terms for the Soviets, but as Stalin ultimately refused to join the system, they were never carried out.)

The final document was faithful to the American agenda. It provided for an "International Monetary Fund," headquartered in Washington, D.C., which would offer emergency loans to member nations. The IMF would also be empowered to impose harsh austerity measures on borrowers, demanding, for example, that they reduce their deficits. Keynes had hoped for a more benign institution, one that dispensed everyday loans for routine trade, but it was not to be. The agreement also created the World Bank to assist in development. Keynes envisaged that the bank would be pivotal to European recovery, but—again—America had other ideas. In the immediate postwar period the bank was reduced to irrelevance by the Marshall Plan.

While White had no use for a contrived currency such as bancor, he recognized that the gold standard had imposed harmful rigidities on the world economy. His solution was to banish gold from sight but not quite from mind. Each currency would be convertible into dollars; additionally, foreign central banks could, if they chose, demand that the US convert their dollars into gold. Thus, Bretton Woods authorized dollars as the universal medium—but only so long as other nations would accept them. In the climate of 1944, when dollars were scarce and hotly coveted, this hardly seemed a serious risk.

The other philosophical chasm between White and Keynes concerned the degree to which currencies other than the dollar would be freely con-

vertible. Keynes, previously an avid currency speculator himself, was wary of letting traders move money around the globe. He feared that speculation would lead to currency upheavals and that Britain in particular would be vulnerable. White, once again, prevailed. Keynes, who died in 1946, lived long enough to predict, correctly, that convertibility would lead to a run on the pound—"a financial Dunkirk."

White was not permitted to enjoy the new order any more than Keynes. He had aspirations of managing the IMF, but by 1947 he was under FBI surveillance. In 1948, he was grilled by a congressional committee and firmly denied Communist allegiance. He then suffered a heart attack and died.



Gamma-Keystone/Getty Images

A demonstration against the Bretton Woods agreements, London, December 1945

A decade of monetary stability followed Bretton Woods. A major reason was that, as Conway notes, the transition in Europe toward free movement of capital was slower than anticipated. Conway might have made more of this. Robert Mundell, the Canadian economist and Nobel laureate, has postulated that of three possible choices—a domestic monetary policy, fixed exchange rates, and the free movement of capital—countries can have two, but not all three. During the first dozen years of Bretton Woods, the first two obtained but not the third. "Only in 1958," Conway writes, "did European countries finally restore convertibility." Restrictions were then removed on currency exchanges for goods and services (though not for currency speculation). In the 1960s, the capital trickle became a powerful stream.

"As capital became more mobile, it became more difficult to maintain exchange rate pegs," Eric Helleiner, a Bretton Woods scholar at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, told me. In the late 1960s, speculative pressures forced revaluations. Also, dollars began to pile up in foreign central banks. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the French finance minister (and later president), accused America of enjoying an "exorbitant privilege." He meant that only the United States could churn out an endless supply of the universally acceptable currency (dollars), while other countries had to actually produce and export goods to obtain them. Ultimately, various European nations began to exchange dollars for gold. As America's gold reserves began to dwindle, the system wobbled. In 1971, President Nixon was forced to end the pledge to convert dollars into gold. Quickly, the entire system of fixed rates

collapsed. The problem was that Bretton Woods had pretended to banish gold but hadn't actually done so. Steil concluded that Bretton Woods died "of its own contradictions."

Over the next decade or so, restrictions on capital in the developed world were swept away. Similar reforms were pushed in the developing world by the IMF, which took the inflexible view that countries gain more than they lose by permitting capital to flow across borders. Since many emerging countries were dependent on the IMF for loans, the IMF was able to enforce significant liberalizations.

But remarkably little changed for the dollar. Today it remains the principal reserve currency. Giscard d'Estaing, now eighty-nine, must be astonished that Americans still enjoy the "privilege" of a world with a seemingly endless appetite for its money. Though America runs a trade deficit year after year, foreign central banks are quite content to loan their surplus money to the US—which borrows from them at very low rates of interest. At present, emerging countries, led by China, hold a staggering \$7 trillion in US Treasury bonds and other forms of dollar-denominated debt. Predictions that the dollar will crash, accompanied by a foreign exodus from US Treasury bonds, have become a staple of economic forecasters. Numerous potential substitutes have been proposed—the yen, the euro, the renminbi. As China's share of the world economy grows, the renminbi is said to be the most likely candidate to replace the dollar, although it is still far from fulfilling the requirements of a reserve currency. It is not convertible, and the Chinese government is not sufficiently transparent. Another possibility, suggested by the economist Barry Eichengreen, is that the dollar may be partially dislodged by a group of currencies.⁴

But since the recent financial crises, the dollar's position as a safe haven has only strengthened. "The great paradox," the late Ronald McKinnon pronounced at a Bretton Woods anniversary gathering last year, is that although the dollar is distrusted because of the US trade deficit, governments and private traders "still consider it the best option."

The speculation about which currency might (eventually) replace the dollar seems in any case beside the point. What ruffles markets and world economies now is not the centrality of the dollar but the absence of coherence. In recent months, central banks in Denmark, Singapore, Turkey, Russia, the eurozone, and elsewhere have launched programs to create inflation in their local currencies. They do so by issuing more currency, potentially leading to higher prices. Although the banks are motivated by domestic concerns (they are trying to stimulate their local economies), their actions are suggestive of the currency wars that disrupted trade during the Great Depression. Early this year Mike Newton, a former trader, wrote in a frantic-sounding *Wall Street Journal* Op-Ed, "The situation demands policy coordination." This was the staple cry of the 1930s.

Conway does not think world leaders

⁴See *Exorbitant Privilege: The Rise and Fall of the Dollar and the Future of the International Monetary System* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

have the will to stage a second Bretton Woods. It is not, however, a question of will but of priorities. A Bretton Woods II would cure volatility, but it would require braking the flow of speculative capital. For many smaller or emerging countries there has, in fact, been some small movement in that direction. For instance, Brazil has imposed a tax on foreign investments in its stock market. "Interest in the use of capital controls has grown in the wake of the Great Recession," according to Michael W. Klein, an economist at Tufts University.⁵

⁵See "Capital Controls: Gates Versus Walls," Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, Fall 2012.

Even the IMF has abandoned its orthodox opposition to capital controls in emerging nations. The arguments for deliberalizing capital boil down to two: first, countries that do not accept speculative inflows are less vulnerable to panicky withdrawals, such as those that pummeled formerly high-growth Asian states in 1997; and second, China's remarkable growth was achieved without liberalizing its controls over capital, which have minimized the ability of speculators to place bets on China's currency.

Nonetheless, most controls (China's excepted) have either been transitory or ineffective. China, which permits trading of its currency only within a

narrow band of values, is itself coming under speculative pressures that could one day force it to adopt a more free-market approach. And there is little support for controls in the developed world. Two generations of bankers, hedge fund traders, and world leaders have been conditioned to believe that capital should be permitted to go where it wants, whatever the upset it may cause to trade, and at whatever risk of speculative bubbles. Western economies once combined private enterprise with restricted capital markets; those days are gone. As Jeffry Frieden told me, "The genie cannot be put back in the bottle."

Conway sounds almost mournful, even though he calls the 1944 agree-

ment flawed. "In this messy world," he concludes, "Bretton Woods has come to represent something hopeful, something closer to perfection." He does not say what that something is—presumably, the lost ideal of equilibrium. Bretton Woods reflected a decision—after the turbulence of depression and war—in favor of stability. Today's pundits may lament the volatility of international capital, but modern leaders, and by extension their electorates, have preferred the mixed benefits of unchecked capital mobility. We will continue to have turmoil over trade and unstable currencies, because that is what most nations want. □

Stalin: 'He Couldn't Have Done It Without Them'

Richard Pipes



Photoquest/Getty Images

Joseph Stalin lying in state, attended by Vyacheslav Molotov, Kliment Voroshilov, Lavrenty Beria, and Georgii Malenkov, Moscow, March 8, 1953

On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics
by Sheila Fitzpatrick.
Princeton University Press,
364 pp., \$35.00

There seems to be an insatiable appetite for biographies of Stalin. The catalog of Harvard University's library lists 690, 203 of them published since the year 2000. Although Stalin plays a central part in Sheila Fitzpatrick's latest book, this is not a biography but something more unusual: a story of the circle or "team" of which he was the leader but on which he was also dependent. She calls Stalin "the lynchpin" and stresses that the team members helped him run the country of which, after 1928, he was the undisputed leader. Yet he relied on them not only politically but also emotionally, especially in his later years. To reveal this mutual dependence is a major contribution of this innovative book.

Sheila Fitzpatrick is a native of Australia and the child of Brian Fitzpatrick, a radical writer of the "fellow traveler" school whose portrait she provided in *My Father's Daughter* (2010). Although she obviously absorbed some

of his radicalism, in time she distanced herself from him and his world outlook. She left her native land to attend Oxford University, where in 1969 she received a doctorate from St. Antony's College. Ultimately, she ended up in the United States, where she taught Soviet history at the University of Chicago. She returned to Australia after a fifty-year absence. She is the author of numerous books, virtually all of them dealing with the Soviet Union.

Fitzpatrick belongs to the school of historians of the USSR known as "revisionists." This school tends to emphasize the complexity of the Soviet regime, rejecting as simplistic the concept of "totalitarianism." It stresses social history at the expense of politics. The totalitarian concept was first formulated in Fascist Italy in the early 1920s: Mussolini defined it as "everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state." Neither Mussolini nor Hitler established truly totalitarian regimes because both retained private property, which limited the power of the state. The founder of the first totalitarian state was Stalin, who nationalized all of the country's economic resources, be they land or industry. Revisionists have made some

valuable contributions to the understanding of Soviet history, but they have tended to underestimate its horrors.

Alexander Yakovlev, Gorbachev's closest adviser and a member of the Politburo with access to all the documents of Lenin's and Stalin's regimes, estimated the victims of the two dictators' reign at 20 million. Some revisionists minimize the evils of terror on the grounds that it not only caused deaths and incarceration but also increased social mobility by allowing others to take over the victims' jobs. This kind of reasoning, if applied to the Holocaust, would see its benefits in the "Aryans" taking over the positions and possessions of the slain Jews.

The head of the "team" in this book's title was, of course, Stalin. Fitzpatrick rightly insists that he was not the kind of nonentity that Trotsky and many others had depicted. In her words, he was "a whole lot cleverer and better-read" than commonly believed. At the same time she characterizes him as "a great evil-doer," a man with "sadistic instincts."

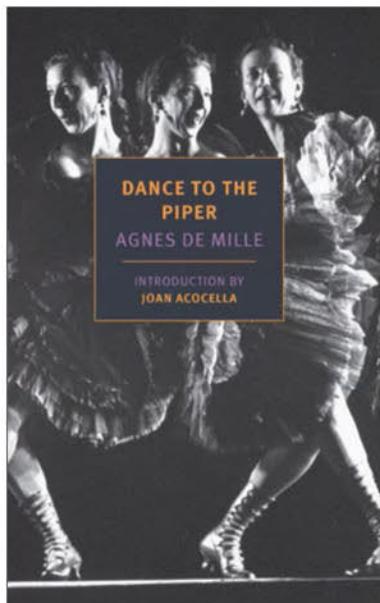
The leading member of the "team" until the eve of Stalin's death was Vyacheslav Molotov. A bureaucrat with

a stony face, he was far from a striking personality: Fitzpatrick says that he could have been "a clerk in a government office" while Trotsky dismissed him as "mediocrity personified." Molotov joined the Bolshevik faction early and eventually became editor of its organ, *Pravda*. When in 1922 Stalin was appointed the Party's general secretary, he became his de facto deputy.

From then on, he was Stalin's shadow, the Bolshevik in whom Stalin placed the greatest trust, and who reciprocated this confidence by supporting all of Stalin's actions, including the murderous purges of the 1930s. Stalin's reliance on Molotov became apparent in 1939 when he entrusted him with the signing of the treaty with Nazi Germany. This loyalty remained steadfast even after 1948, when Stalin ordered the arrest of Molotov's Jewish wife for "treason."

Another prominent member of the group was Anastas Mikoyan, an Armenian who joined the Bolshevik Party in 1915 and from the early years of the Soviet regime attached himself to Stalin. He was active both before and during World War II in developing the Soviet food industry. At various times, besides Molotov and Mikoyan, the group included Nikolai Bukharin, Nikolai

A memoir by one of the most important and influential of American choreographers



Born into a family of successful playwrights and producers, Agnes de Mille was determined to be an actress. Then one day she witnessed the Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova, and her life was altered forever. Hypnotized by Pavlova's beauty, in that moment de Mille dedicated herself to dance. Her memoir records with lighthearted humor and wisdom not only the difficulties she faced—the resistance of her parents, the sacrifices of her training—but also the frontier atmosphere of early Hollywood and New York and London during the Depression. "This is the story of an American dancer," writes de Mille, "a spoiled egocentric wealthy girl, who learned with difficulty to become a worker, to set and meet standards, to brace a Victorian sensibility to contemporary roughhousing, and who, with happy good fortune, participated by the side of great colleagues in a renaissance of the most ancient and magical of all the arts."

"[A] finely written memoir, *Dance to the Piper*... was originally published in 1951. It's a dry and self-deprecating bildungsroman that was, by her account, scratched out on napkins and envelopes while she was 'doing a barre' or tending to an infant." —Harper's

"Perhaps the best dancer ever to write and the best writer ever to dance." —Newsday

"Enhanced with traditional ballet as well as the modern school, [de Mille] was associated with both, but she made her success in her own style of American modern. She writes with verve about all three schools, describes perspectively the inseparability of dancer and dancing, the agonies of work and exhaustion, the personality of the true ballerina who must be cut off from the norm of social and sexual life." —Kirkus Reviews

"One of the finest and most eloquent writers on dance the world has known."

—Clive Barnes, *Dance Magazine*

DANCE TO THE PIPER

Agnes de Mille

Introduction by Joan Acocella

Paperback and e-book
On sale November 24th

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or visit www.nyrb.com

Bulganin, Lavrenty Beria, Felix Dzerzhinsky, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Georgii Malenkov, and Nikita Khrushchev.

Fitzpatrick makes it clear that membership in Stalin's team did not ensure security:

Stalin was a suspicious man. He was suspicious even of his own team.... He kept tabs on them, encouraged informing, liked to keep them off balance, and sometimes set traps for them.... Nobody on the team could consider himself safe.

Khrushchev in his memoirs graphically described how precarious was the position and even the life of every member of Stalin's intimate circle. Toward the end of his life, for no known reason, Stalin became suspicious of both Molotov and Mikoyan, his oldest associates. In 1952, he called them "hirelings of American imperialism" and accused them of being English or American spies, which suggested that their days were probably numbered. Publicly, Stalin

attacked Molotov with particular viciousness.... He brought up the old charges of currying favor with Western journalists...; he also raised the question of why Molotov wanted "to give Crimea to the Jews" and why he had told his wife about secret Politburo decisions. As for Mikoyan, Stalin said he had probably been plotting... to sell out Soviet interests to the Americans.

In March 1949, Stalin removed Molotov from the post of minister of foreign affairs and Mikoyan from the post of minister of foreign trade. The lives of the two were likely saved by Stalin's sudden death three years later.

When the Germans attacked the USSR in June 1941, Stalin was so shocked that for a week he withdrew from public life and fell into some kind of coma. As Fitzpatrick points out, he had expected his alliance with the Nazis to last several years during which he could bring his military establishment into "full operational and fighting trim." For this reason, he ignored repeated warnings from the West and his own agents that Hitler was preparing an imminent invasion. This had disastrous consequences leading to the destruction of much of the Soviet military in the early months of the war. During World War II, when Stalin oversaw grand strategy and the appointments of top commanders, much of the day-to-day management of the country fell into the hands of his associates organized as the State Defense Committee (GKO). As Fitzpatrick writes, citing Mikoyan:

When the GKO's core Group of Five (Stalin, Molotov, Malenkov, Beria, and Mikoyan) met, as they usually did late in the evening without a precirculated agenda or minutes taken, "each of us had full possibility to speak and defend his opinion or suggestion," and Stalin's attitude was "reasonable and patient," even if he didn't like what someone said. It quite often happened that Stalin, "convinced by our arguments," changed the opinion he had had at the beginning.

Marshal Georgy Zhukov, the architect of Soviet victory in World War II, was not a member of the team but of Stalin's informal military "brain trust," yet he did not fear contradicting Stalin. During the war, Stalin was in charge of military affairs while his associates ran the economy. The partnership worked well and brought the Soviet Union victory.

Matters did not change after the war. Indeed, the responsibilities of the team increased as Stalin spent ever more time in the south, away from the Kremlin. As he grew old, Stalin looked to his team not only for assistance in running the country but also for succor in his loneliness:

Stalin had been lonely since the breakup of his prewar social cir-

Joseph Stalin



cle, first through his wife's death and then through the arrest of various relatives during the Great Purges, and he grew lonelier after the war, with a total estrangement from the old network of in-laws and no new friends or partner to fill the gaps. This threw him back on the team for companionship. A wartime habit of team meetings late in the day, ending in a shared supper, was continued in less spartan form. Since Stalin hated to be alone, the team was drafted with increasing frequency for dinners at Stalin's dacha that started late, often after a film showing at the Kremlin; [they] were marked by heavy (compulsory) drinking, as well as a certain amount of work discussion; and went on until the not-very-early hours of the morning (4:00 or 5:00 AM).

Milovan Djilas, a prominent Yugoslav Communist who visited the USSR during the war, found these dinners to be rather congenial occasions: "It all rather resembled a patriarchal family with a crotchety head whose foibles always made his kinsfolk rather apprehensive."

As his energy declined, Stalin handed ever more business to members of his team: he let them make decisions that he simply approved. The government now was run by Beria, Malenkov, Khrushchev and Bulganin. The last policy Stalin initiated was a drive against Soviet Jews, a policy that the team did not approve. (When Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop in 1939 and 1940 complained that there were too many Jews in the Soviet government, Stalin promised him and the

Führer that as soon as he had enough Russians to run things, he would eliminate Jewish officials.)

In January 1953, he charged a number of Jewish physicians working in the Kremlin with having caused the death of some prominent Soviet personalities. The "Doctor's Plot" led to the arrest of some Jewish physicians. More ominously, preparations were made for the deportation of several million Soviet Jews to Siberia and Central Asia. According to Fitzpatrick, by this time Stalin's paranoia knew "no bounds."

When Stalin died, the team quietly took over. It was designated as "collective leadership" consisting of Malenkov, Beria, and Molotov. The transition was smoother than one might have expected after a quarter-century of Stalin's dictatorship. The team promptly released the arrested Jewish doctors, declared an amnesty that led to the release of more than a million prisoners, and talked of a "détente" in the cold war. Beria, the hated and feared head of the secret police, was executed. It was generally expected that either Molotov or Malenkov would succeed Stalin but since neither showed an inclination to challenge the collective leadership, they remained in place for the next five years, until 1958 when Nikita Khrushchev took over.

As Fitzpatrick points out, some of her interpretations have been anticipated. In particular, the Russian scholar Oleg Khlevniuk did pioneering work with his *Master of the House: Stalin and His Inner Circle*, originally published in the 1990s, in which he stressed the influence of Stalin's staff. Similar contributions were made by Stephen Wheatcroft and Arch Getty.

On Stalin's Team is an important book because it modifies the prevalent view of Joseph Stalin as a lone dictator and his staff as flunkies who merely carried out his orders. It shows that, in fact, Stalin's dictatorship was something of a collegiate arrangement in which the dictator had the ultimate power to appoint his staff and take or reject its advice. Yet, Fitzpatrick writes, "they couldn't have done it without him. But the corollary is also true: he couldn't have done it without them." In her conclusion, Fitzpatrick refers to the totalitarian model:

Based on observation of similarities between mid-twentieth-century fascist regimes and the Soviet regime under Stalin, the totalitarian model posited a regime headed by a charismatic leader, ruling through a mobilizing party aspiration and a secret police force, and aspiring to total control over society. Much ink has been spilled, including by me, on the applicability of this model to Soviet history. As far as the present study is concerned, however, the model's relevance is quite limited, as it never focused on Stalin's relationship with his closest advisors or attached particular importance to it.

This kind of "revisionism" is persuasive. In my opinion it does not invalidate the totalitarian concept nor does it, as the Princeton University Press blurb claims, paint "an entirely new picture of Stalin within his milieu." But it does add a new dimension to the totalitarian model. As such, Sheila Fitzpatrick's book is to be warmly welcomed. □

The Greatness of William Blake

Richard Holmes

Those Who Write for Immortality: Romantic Reputations and the Dream of Lasting Fame

by H. J. Jackson.
Yale University Press,
294 pp., \$35.00

Eternity's Sunrise: The Imaginative World of William Blake

by Leo Damrosch.
Yale University Press,
332 pp., \$30.00

Poems

by William Blake, selected
and introduced by Patti Smith.
Vintage, 192 pp., \$9.95 (paper)

1.

There are many William Blakes, but mine arrived with the tigers in the 1960s. The first line I ever read by Blake was not in a book, but laid out in thick white paint (or should I say *illuminated*) along a brick wall in Silver Street, Cambridge, England, in 1968. It was not poetry, but prose: "The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction." It sent a strange shiver down my spine, as it did for thousands of other university students in England and America that year.

It turns out that, according to *The New York Times* of December 28, 1968, exactly the same line from Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" appeared on big posters at the conference of the Modern Language Association in New York. According to the *Times* it signified that "Radical Agitation Among Scholars Grows," and it led to several arrests.

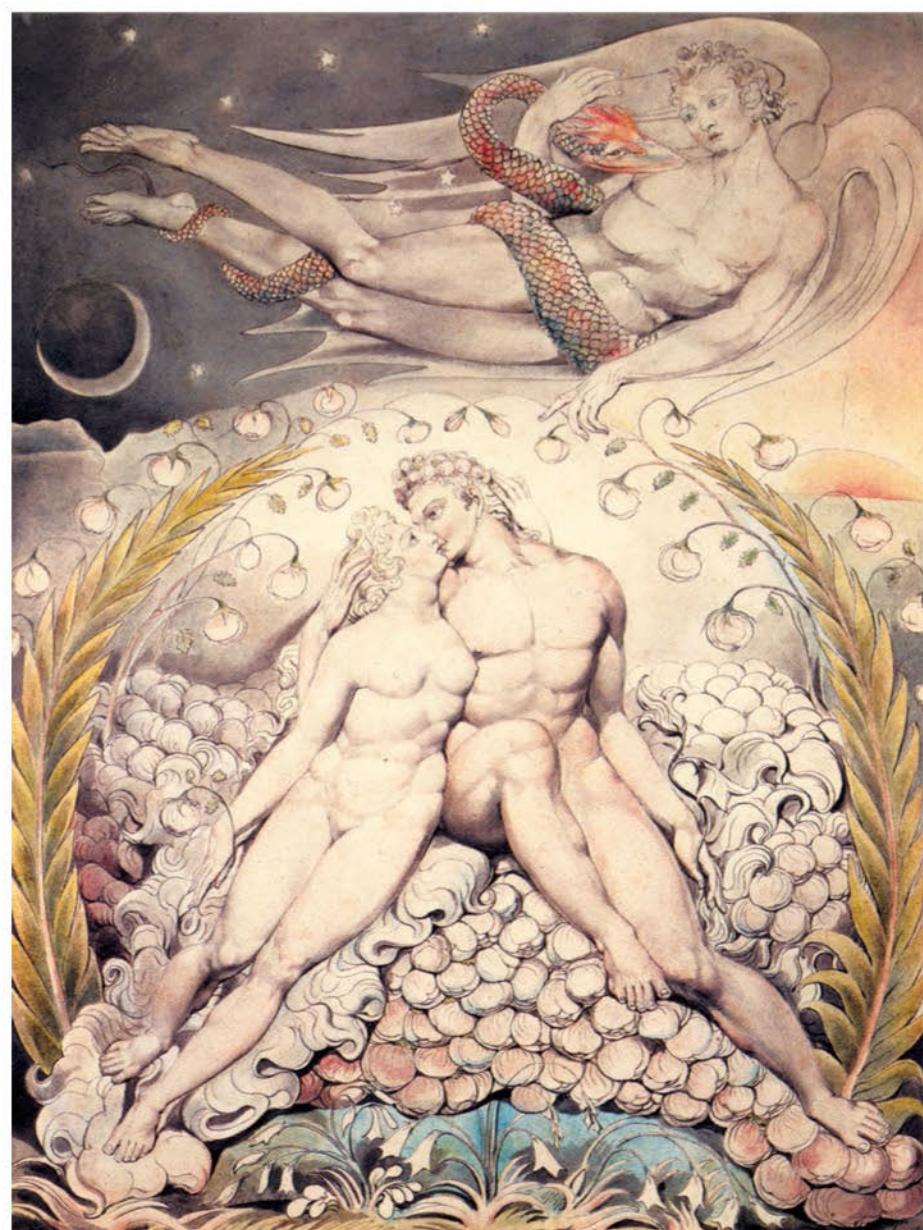
This of course was the time of radical disturbances on university campuses across Europe, as well as Vietnam War and civil rights protests in America. Very quickly we all seemed to be reading Blake's preface to *Milton*. This contains the great radical hymn, now known as "Jerusalem," with which we identified; although in England, paradoxically, it was also sung at the patriotic last night of the London Proms concert amid much flag-waving, and still is:

*I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my
hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and
pleasant land.*

But we also found at the start of the preface a thrilling exhortation that seemed to speak to us with extraordinary force and immediacy:

Rouze up, O Young Men of the New Age! Set your foreheads against the ignorant hirelings! For we have hirelings in the Camp, the Court, and the University, who would, if they could, for ever depress mental, and prolong corporal war.

Later this passage was used to set the theme and temper of Theodore



'Satan Watching the Caresses of Adam and Eve'; watercolor by William Blake for John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 1808

Roszac's influential book *The Making of a Counter-Culture* (1969). Penguin produced a popular anthology inspired by Blake: *Children of Albion: Poetry of the Underground in Britain* (1969). Allen Ginsberg began hypnotically chanting Blake at huge public readings, sometimes accompanied by what appeared to me (at the London Festival Hall, at any rate) to be a small, droning, portable harmonium.

In those days we didn't tackle *Milton* itself, which seemed a strange production, one of the so-called Prophetic Books, very long and labyrinthine, and apparently requiring beforehand a total immersion in *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), Northrop Frye's equally labyrinthine study of Blake's symbolism. But we did find and celebrate Blake's two great explosive revolutionary chants from the *Songs of Experience* (1794), "The Tyger" and "London." The first seemed an invocation of pure energy (with unsettling hints of the atom bomb):

*In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?*

The second seemed like a piece of furious, contemporary street protest. The following year I found myself discussing it with two young GIs, as we stood together on the top platform of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. They were

on European leave, but expecting to fly back to Vietnam. We had a brief and totally unexpected meeting of minds—and hearts—that I have never forgotten. Looking down at the ornate Pisan Baptistery, we quoted Blake to one another:

*How the chimney-sweeper's cry
Every black'ning church appals;
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace walls.*

All this seems a long time ago. The poem "London" is now carved for tourists into the pavement on the south side of Westminster Bridge. One can walk into the British Library in London, under the great bronze statue of Eduardo Paolozzi's version of Blake's "Newton" (1995), and find Blake's "Rossetti Notebook" on display under the quiet lamps, and read a digital projection of the original version of "The Tyger," with its many haunting manuscript variations:

*In the well of sanguine woe
In what clay & in what mould
Were thy eyes of fury roll'd...*

My Blake, the radical visionary poet of the 1960s, seems almost old-fashioned now. I realize how many other Blakes there have been, both before and since. They include the bardic mystic popularized by the poets

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1868) and W. B. Yeats (1893); the Marxist protester championed by the scientist Jacob Bronowski (1944); the inspired London dreamer summoned up by the biographers Mona Wilson (1927) and especially Peter Ackroyd (1995); the great psychological mythmaker analyzed by the critics Northrop Frye (1947) and Harold Bloom (1963); the agitator and revolutionary of the political historians E. P. Thompson (*Witness Against the Beast*, 1995) and David Erdman (*Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, 1974); and the man of "minute particulars" slowly and meticulously assembled by the inexhaustible scholar-researcher G. E. Bentley Jr., the author of two editions of *Blake Records* (1969, 1988) and *A Stranger from Paradise* (2001), a monumental compilation-biography, aimed to subdue "the factual Laocoön" of the life.

Add to these Blake as the protagonist of innumerable Freudian, Swedenborgian, Neoplatonist, Zen Buddhist, and, more recently, excellent feminist studies (*Women Reading William Blake*, 2007, including essays by Germaine Greer, Tracy Chevalier, and Helen Bruder). Nor can we overlook Marsha Keith Schuchard, the author of *Why Mrs. Blake Cried* (2006), with her detailed explorations (and illustrations) of Blake's supposed excursions into ecstatic tantric sex.

2.

Yet there is a sense in which the first popular Blake emerged 150 years earlier in the 1860s, as a radical engraver and illustrator, or "Pictor Ignotus." This was the subtitle—"The Unknown Painter"—of the great Victorian biography by Alexander Gilchrist, first published in 1863, that saved Blake from total obscurity.

In her fine recent study of the growth and decline of poetic reputations among the Romantic poets, *Those Who Write for Immortality*, Heather Jackson pays a good deal of attention to Gilchrist's "superb" and "ground-breaking" achievement. Jackson is a distinguished Coleridge scholar and editor. Her lively and immensely knowledgeable book is based on a series of sharply contrasted nineteenth-century literary case histories. She challenges the notion that literary "immortality" must necessarily be based on intrinsic worth, or a "heroic" Wordsworthian concept of emerging merit. "Put not thy faith in posterity," as she drily observes.

When more than five thousand British writers published at least one book of poems between 1780 and 1835, why—and how—she asks, did less than a dozen survive into the twenty-first century? Why did Wordsworth's reputation flourish into the twenty-first century rather than George Crabbe's or Robert Southey's? Why has Keats survived rather than Barry Cornwall? Why were William Blake and John Clare eventually "recovered," but not the hugely popular and best-selling "ploughboy poet" Robert Bloomfield?

Part of her answer lies in the reception of the work by each writer. In

succeeding generations, there were favorable critics, publishers, biographers, literary societies, schoolteachers, heritage curators, even tourist authorities (like the English Lake District) ready to promote certain authors, but not others. Against all expectation, Blake found just such a champion.

In Chapter 5, neatly entitled “Raising the Unread,” Jackson looks at the idea of “recovery projects” in publishing, and singles out Gilchrist’s biography as the masterpiece. Aided by a handful of Blake’s barely surviving disciples, from the originally youthful “Ancients”—notably the aging painters John Linnell and Samuel Palmer—Gilchrist achieved an astonishing resurrection by the posthumous publication of his *Life of William Blake* in 1863. “Blake’s may be the most extreme case of rescue from oblivion in literary history.” To which Jackson adds shrewdly: “I doubt we are done reinventing him.”

It has to be remembered that Blake was almost completely forgotten at the time of his death in a tiny two-room apartment in Fountain Court, a narrow alley off the Strand in London, in 1827. He had sold less than thirty copies of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794). Of the great illuminated Prophetic Books, *The French Revolution* (1791) had never been published for fear of prosecution, only four copies of *Milton* (1804/1810) were printed in his lifetime, and only five of his tortured, apocalyptic masterwork *Jerusalem* (1810/1820), of which just two fully colored originals now remain.

Blake had been mocked in a notorious obituary in Leigh Hunt’s liberal newspaper the *Examiner* as “an unfortunate lunatic.” Both Wordsworth and Southey thought Blake was “perfectly mad,” and even Coleridge—who was exceptional in having read the *Songs* in a rare copy, thought Blake was gifted but deeply eccentric. The author of “Kubla Khan” wrote: “You perhaps smile at my calling another poet a mystic; but verily I am in the very mire of commonplace common sense compared with Mr Blake, apo- or rather ana-calyptic poet and painter.” So Gilchrist’s biography was indeed an astonishing work of recovery.

It was also, in several senses, a labor of love. Having published a life of the erotic painter William Etty, Gilchrist and his young wife Anne Gilchrist dedicated themselves and their marriage to a decade of researching and retrieving Blake’s forgotten work, and faithfully retracing his footsteps and the places where he saw his visions. Among these activities is a superb account of Blake’s early and happiest home at 13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, just south of the Thames in London, where he wrote and engraved so much of his best and most accessible work: *Songs of Experience; America: A Prophecy; A Song of Liberty; Visions of the Daughters of Albion; and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (which includes those “Proverbs of Hell”).

Gilchrist unearthed the famous story of Blake and his wife discovered sunbathing naked in the little garden: “Come in! it’s only Adam and Eve, you know.” This supposedly shocking piece of Miltonic nudism has been passionately disputed by scholars ever since, notably by Wilson and Bentley (who consigns it to a footnote headed

“Red Herrings”). Nonetheless Ackroyd believes Gilchrist’s account, as witnessing typical Swedenborgian “sexual magic...nothing peculiar,” while it is beautifully vindicated by the novelist Tracy Chevalier in her essay in *Women Reading William Blake* and in her Blakean fiction, *Burning Bright* (2007).

The Gilchrists also tracked down Blake’s cottage by the sea at Felpham, Sussex, the only place he lived outside London, where he worked on *Milton* between 1800 and 1803, writing that rousing preface and such stunning, angry passages as “The Wine-Press of Los”:

*This Wine-press is call’d War
on Earth: it is the
Printing-Press
Of Los; and here he
lays his words in
order above the mor-
tal brain...
But in the Wine-
presses the Human
grapes sing not nor
dance!
They howl and writhe
in shoals of tor-
ment...*

It was also a period of wonderful letters filled with gnomic utterances: “The Ruins of Time build Mansions in Eternity” or “My fingers emit sparks of fire with Expectation of my future labors.” Here too he was arrested for throwing a drunken soldier out of his garden, and tried for sedition. Felpham incidentally is the one Blakean address that can still be visited today, a long low thatched cottage, of flint and brick, with an extraordinary brooding atmosphere, its deep windows staring out toward the sea and infinity. The Blake Society recently raised more than half a million pounds to purchase it but would still be grateful for any support.*

Throughout, Gilchrist gives exuberant and unforgettable verbal descriptions of Blake’s illuminated manuscripts:

The ever-fluctuating colour, the spectral pygmies rolling, flying, leaping among the letters; the ripe bloom of quiet corners, the living light and bursts of flame...make the page seem to move and quiver within its boundaries.

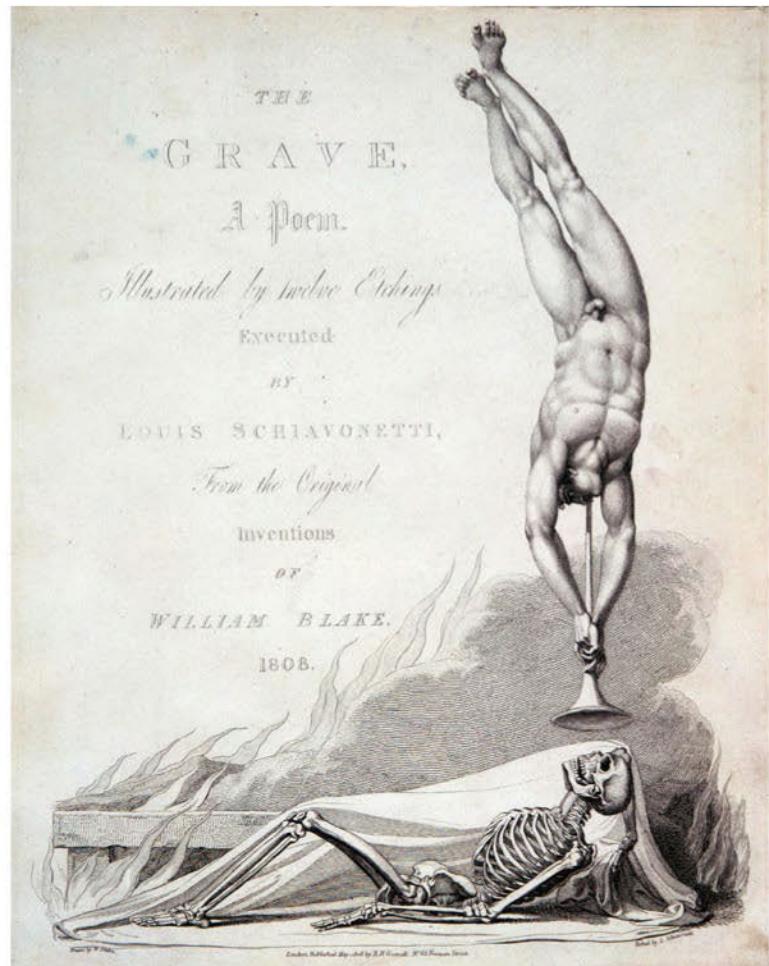
These can at last be set against the magnificent six-volume Blake Trust/Princeton facsimile illuminated edition of the Prophetic Books.

But Gilchrist also does something biographically subtler. He draws attention to the quality and range of Blake’s professional work as a commercial illustrator and engraver for others. These examples gave a completely new idea of Blake’s rich and varied connections with his contemporaries, rather than his cultural isolation. It is now

*See www.blakesociety.org/blakecotage/.

known that Blake engraved research papers for the Royal Society, for a children’s book by Mary Wollstonecraft, for Lavater’s *Physiognomy*, for Erasmus Darwin’s scientific poem *The Botanic Garden*, for the Wedgwoods’ *Pottery Catalogue*, for John Stedman’s antislavery *Narrative...Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (illustrations of intense gloom power), and for the biography by his Felpham patron William Haley of the melancholy poet William Cowper, with whom Blake tenderly identified.

Blake also illustrated some of the most widely read serious classics of the day: Milton’s *Paradise Lost*; Dante’s *Inferno*; Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts*;



The frontispiece, designed by William Blake, of Robert Blair’s poem *The Grave*, 1808

the Book of Job; and Robert Blair’s *The Grave*, for which Heather Jackson reproduces, appropriately enough, Blake’s superb frontispiece showing a clamorous trumpet-blasting inverted airborne angel of Resurrection.

Gilchrist’s greatest strength lies in what Jackson calls his “sympathetic but not uncritical” understanding of Blake’s psychology, notably addressed in a forthright chapter entitled “Mad or Not Mad?” Gilchrist quietly explains the “extravagant and apocryphal stories” that were current: young Blake seeing angels in the trees, his many later visions in his studio, his jousts against science and literalism, and his belief that his dead brother Robert was still with him thirteen years later and that he wrote from Robert’s dictation. Equally Gilchrist briskly repudiates any attempt to associate Blake with the then-fashionable Victorian supernaturalism—“the table-turning, wainscot-knocking, bosh-propounding ‘Spiritualism’ of the present hour.”

Most important of all, Gilchrist identified—and reprinted for the first time—key passages in Blake’s work, such as the “Jerusalem” poem, “The Tyger,” and “The Proverbs of Hell.” Yet as Jackson points out, the one as-

pect of Blake’s work for which he drew something of a blank was the Prophetic Books. After Gilchrist’s premature death from scarlet fever, when weakened and exhausted from his Blake researches, Anne Gilchrist “abandoned” any serious attempt at a commentary. Much of the subsequent history of modern Blake studies has involved various attempts to grapple with these great but undoubtedly difficult works. As Blake wrote in *Jerusalem*:

*I give you the end of a golden
string;
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven’s gate,
Built in Jerusalem’s wall.*

3.

Professor Leo Damrosch, from Yale, Princeton, and then Harvard, has taken a notable part in this long, scholarly tradition of winding in Blake’s golden string. He has spent a lifetime reading and teaching Blake, and over thirty-five years ago (when he was known as Leopold) he published his first long, detailed academic study, largely of the Prophetic Books, *Symbol and Truth in Blake’s Myth* (1980). In it he argued that Blake could never truly reconcile the elements of his whole symbolic system, and that the strength of the Prophetic Books—especially *Milton* and *Jerusalem*—lay precisely in their implicit psychological contradictions, their “contrary states” of mind, especially as described by Freud. “Blake turned psychosexual experience into philosophical structure.”

Eternity’s Sunrise: The Imaginative World of

William Blake is a shorter and more intimate book, part biography, part critical reflection, and part a scholar’s testimony to the experience of actually teaching Blake over many years to generations of eager (but often skeptical) students. Damrosch writes movingly of his own convictions:

After half a century of living with Blake, I am still in awe of the depth and range of his genius. He honors the simplicity of childhood without ever condescending. He exposes hypocrisy and exploitation with challenging severity. He movingly dramatizes the turbulent dynamics of the psyche. He celebrates a spiritual connection with the world.... Like the Zen masters, Blake urges us to put aside preoccupation with self and to learn to be.

He is in other words a true Blakean.

The book is dedicated to Harold Bloom (among others), and in some measure is a thoughtful revision of Bloom’s influential and flamboyant mythological approach in *Blake’s Apocalypse* (1963). But by contrast Damrosch’s entire tone is careful, sensible, and explanatory, though with occasional wicked professorial sallies:

The library in Donald Trump's extravagant edifice on Central Park in New York reportedly displays another Proverb of Hell, transformed into a self-congratulatory slogan: "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom."

The main sweep of his book carries the reader as steadily as possible into the increasingly complex world of Blake's private mythology, while ingeniously relating it to his illuminated manuscripts (many beautifully reproduced in color, and some decidedly weird). Despite street-cred references to the psychedelic band the Doors, or Aldous Huxley's drug-taking, or the film *Chariots of Fire*, there is a certain pedagogic earnestness about *Eternity's Sunrise*. The two central chapters are entitled "How Should We Understand Blake's Symbols?" and "Understanding Blake's Myth." One summary states: "Milton is about the Puritan poet's quest to renounce his errors, reunite with his feminine element, and overcome selfhood. And *Jerusalem* is about the rehabilitation of the universal man, Albion...."

Yet Damrosch eschews the wilder excursions into world mythology favored for example by Frye. Indeed he is surprisingly critical of Frye, in both his antiscientific readings of Blake and his general theory of an "Orc cycle" in which "every revolution degenerates into repression."

Instead Damrosch keeps a fine eye on the revealing biographical detail that continuously anchors Blake in the real world. He notes that Blake the engraver owned a big star wheel rolling press that weighed seven hundred pounds, stood five feet high, and was faithfully carried to each of his studios over thirty years, though it took "four strong men" to disassemble and transport it. Or he remarks that Blake could lean out of the window of his last tiny lodgings in Fountain Court and just glimpse the river Thames, sometimes "like a bar of gold." He adds Blake's comment: "I live in a hole here, but God has a beautiful mansion for me elsewhere."

Threading through this observant biography, he patiently—if sometimes doggedly—follows the line of transformation that carries Blake's early mythic figures from the unpublished *The Four Zoas* (1797), with what he now describes as each corresponding "Jungian category," into the major Prophetic Books. Certainly it is a delight to meet such clear archetypes as the beautiful, young fiery Orc in eternal revolutionary opposition to tyrannical, ugly old Urizen. But after this there emerge the stranger, smokier, shifting figures like Los (the furious blacksmith-creator-destroyer), or Urthona-Enitharmon (his sometime wife, the voluptuous or dominating female force in Nature), or the Giant Albion (the nation or the universal man) with their increasingly convoluted system of "Emanations" or doubles, their ever-changing identities, and their ambiguous or "obsessive" illuminated imagery of liberation or imprisonment, sadism or submission.

In the end, Damrosch chooses to treat both *Milton* and *Jerusalem* as essentially psychological dramas, in which the original revolutionary impulse has dispersed. Their myths present "profound insights into the divided self, a condition that many people experience to some extent and that Blake

experienced to a terrifying degree." The account of *Milton*, if strange—Milton himself dives down like a falling star over the Felpham cottage to enter Blake by his left foot or "tarsus"—is impressive. But how far Damrosch's students stuck it out with their Blakean professor to the wilder shore of *Jerusalem*, which he refers to as "a fantasized alternative to life," citing a psychoanalytic verdict on the poem as "a compensatory fantasy...infantile megalomania," I wonder. Though he does make frequent reassuring asides: "No one is obliged to accept Blake's system at face value."

It strikes me that Damrosch writes particularly well about Blake and America. This begins with a fine, fresh description of *America: A Prophecy*, both its poetry and its artwork. It is the earliest Prophetic Book (1793), which is only eighteen pages long, most beautifully illustrated, and yet often too neglected. He quotes with great insight and originality from the text, for example this vision of "red Orc's" revolutionary storm bursting upon an unsuspecting nation:

*The citizens of New York close their books and lock their chests;
The mariners of Boston drop their anchors and unlade;
The scribe of Pennsylvania casts his pen upon the earth;
The builder of Virginia throws his hammer down in fear.
Then had America been lost, o'erwhelmed by the Atlantic,
And Earth had lost another portion of the infinite,
But all rush together in the night in wrath and raging fire.*

Here we are surprised not only by specific references to Franklin and Jefferson, but also the gathering power of the long, apocalyptic line that will resurface in Walt Whitman, and ultimately in Allen Ginsberg. Quoting William Michael Rossetti, Damrosch calls Blake aptly "the supreme painter of fire." He later compares Blake's increasingly visionary and distanced apocalypse to that of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*.

But Damrosch is evidently uneasy about Blake's attitude toward sex and women. He remarks that "in the heyday of the 1960s counterculture" Blake was frequently invoked as a representative of liberation and "positive" sexuality. The great chorus was: "Everything that lives is holy." But in fact Blake "was always aware that sex can be a means of exerting control." He was increasingly "tormented" by the subject and drew naked bodies that were "unerotic, and at times positively repellent," a term of revulsion Damrosch later repeats.

These revisionist readings are explored in two powerful chapters: "The Torments of Love and Jealousy" and "The Female Will." Here he takes on board the new feminist criticism of Blake, citing the scholar Helen Bruder: Blake was "by turns a searching critic of patriarchy but also a hectoring misogynist." But Damrosch does believe that Blake once responded to Mary Wollstonecraft's "pioneering feminist analysis" in her revolutionary tract *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). The young Blake had "affini-

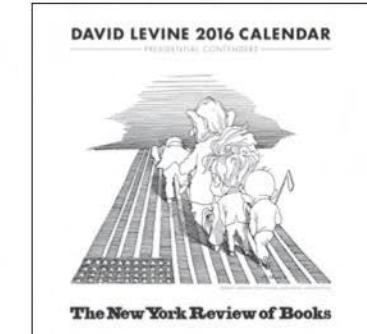
ties" with her sexual politics, and reflected her appeal for sexual justice in another powerful poem the following year: "Enslav'd, the Daughters of Albion weep; a trembling lamentation/Upon their mountains; in their valleys, sighs toward America." In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), Blake also produced perhaps the most appealing female figure in his entire work, the "soft soul of America," the wonderfully named Oothoon.

Damrosch asks if Blake's marriage was really the happy, artisan partnership portrayed by Gilchrist. He mentions periods of estrangement and jealousy, Blake's desire for several wives (recorded by the diarist Crabb Robinson), and many disturbing passages and illustrations in the Prophetic Books, not least Oothoon's rape and subsequent sufferings. He cites contemporary testimony to Catherine's wifely trials:

She would get up in the night, when he was under his very fierce inspirations, which were as if they would tear him asunder.... She had to sit motionless and silent, only to stay him mentally, without moving hand or foot; this for hours, and night after night.

Catherine's famous remark "I have very little of Mr. Blake's company, he is always in Paradise" was innocently placed by G. E. Bentley Jr. as the epigraph to his biography of 2001. But Damrosch observes evenly that this is "surely ironic!" He concludes that in this matter at least, our liberated Blake of the 1960s must be regrettably relinquished. "Blake is not really a prophet of unconflicted sexuality, and his vision is closer to the tragic one that Freud expresses."

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BACON AT GAGOSIAN



Francis Bacon, *Self-Portrait*, 1987;
oil on canvas, 14 x 12 inches

Colm Tóibín's essay "Late Francis Bacon: Spirit & Substance" [NYR, November 19] and the accompanying illustrations were drawn from the catalog of the exhibition "Francis Bacon: Late Paintings" at the Gagosian Gallery, New York City, November 7–December 12, 2015.

LETTERS

MICHAEL WALZER'S LECTURE

To the Editors:

Michael Walzer will deliver the twentieth annual Irving Howe Memorial Lecture at 6:30 PM on Monday, December 14, in the Elebash Recital Hall of the CUNY Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Avenue (at 34th Street). The subject is "On Democratic Internationalism." Walzer is professor emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton and the author of *Just and Unjust Wars*, *Spheres of Justice*, *On Toleration*, and, most recently, *The Paradox of Liberation*, among many other works, as well as editor emeritus of *Dissent* magazine. Sponsored by the Center for the Humanities, these lectures honor the late critic, editor, and political writer Irving Howe (1920–1993), who taught at the City University of New York from 1963 to 1986. They are made possible by a generous gift from the late Max Palevsky and are free and open to the public. For additional information please call (212) 817-2005 or consult the website of the Center for the Humanities, centerforthehumanities.org/.

Morris Dickstein
Center for the Humanities
CUNY Graduate Center
New York City

AN OPEN LETTER IN SUPPORT OF JASON REZAIAN

To the Iranian authorities:

We, the undersigned, are compelled to express our outrage at the arrest and conviction of the Iranian-American journalist Jason Rezaian, who has been detained since July 2014 by the Islamic Republic of Iran. He was accused of espionage and, following a closed trial, was convicted. He now faces a sentence of ten to twenty years in prison.

Mr. Rezaian, a reporter for *The Washington Post*, is known as a man of peace. The possibility that he had any direct or indirect access to classified information has been refuted by his defense attorney, who has also reported that, in a clear denial of due process, she was not permitted to respond orally to the prosecution in court.

Jason Rezaian's detention is a flagrant and unjust violation of the freedom, security, and safety of a journalist who is a

victim—arrested without cause, held for months in solitary confinement and without access to a lawyer, subjected to physical mistreatment and psychological abuse, and now convicted without basis. He has already spent more than fifteen months in Iran's notorious Evin Prison, more than three times as long as any other Western journalist.

We strongly deplore and condemn the detention, persecution, and conviction of Jason Rezaian, and call upon all international organizations, academic and professional associations, and other groups and individuals devoted to the promotion and defense of human rights to strongly protest and condemn this arbitrary verdict, to call for his immediate and unconditional release, and to urge the officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran to respect, guarantee, and implement the provisions and principles of human rights as specified in international conventions and treaties to which Iran has long been a signatory. For more information on Mr. Rezaian, we ask you to visit the New School's Endangered Scholars Worldwide website at bit.do/Jason_Rezaian.

Noam Chomsky, Jerome Cohen, Juan Cole, Simon Critchley, Wendy Doniger, Rebecca Goldstein, Eva Hoffman, Ira Katznelson, Baroness Helena Kennedy, Bob Kerrey, Arien Mack, Avishai Margalit, Victor Navasky, Aryeh Neier, Steven Pinker, Robert Pinsky, Ken Roth, Gayatri Spivak, Michael Walzer, and Marina Warner

HELEN VENDLER IN NEW YORK

Helen Vendler, the A. Kingsley Porter University Professor at Harvard, will deliver the Robert B. Silvers Lecture, titled "Poets as Editors," at the New York Public Library on Tuesday, December 8, 2015, at 7:00 PM. For tickets and information visit nypl.org/live2015 or call 888-718-4253.

INQUIRING INTO ANGLETON

For a biography of James Angleton, former CIA counterintelligence chief, I am looking for correspondence, photographs, and memories of the man and/or his wife Cicely D'Autremont Angleton. Confidentiality assured. Please write to Jefferson Morley at morleycia@gmail.com.

Jefferson Morley
Washington, D.C.

CORRECTIONS

Svetlana Alexievich's "The Man Who Flew" [NYR, November 19] should have been given its original full title: "The Story of the Man Who Flew Like a Bird: Ivan Mashovets—Graduate Student of the Philosophy Department."

In his review of Orhan Pamuk's *A Strangeness in My Mind* [NYR, November 5], Colin Thubron wrote that one of the novel's main characters, Süleyman, elopes with a woman named Samiha. The offender was his best friend, not Süleyman. Also, the name of the character Rayha was misspelled as Rahiya.

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ANNOUNCING

The Francis Bacon Award in the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology

The California Institute of Technology and the Francis Bacon Foundation are pleased to request nominations for the Francis Bacon Award in the history of science, the history of technology, or historically-engaged philosophy of science.

The Francis Bacon Prize

Offered biennially in the amount of \$20,000, the Prize will be awarded to an outstanding scholar whose work continues to have a substantial impact on any of the three fields. The winner of the Bacon Prize will be invited to spend one term (3 months) at Caltech. Funds will be provided to compensate the winner's home institution for the period of residence at Caltech, and the winner for costs of transportation and local housing. A biennial conference will bring together the best younger and established scholars in the area of the Bacon Visiting Professor's specific interests.

Previous awardees are:

Jürgen Renn (2016)
Max Planck Institute for the History of Science

Lisa Jardine (2012)
Centre for Editing Lives and Letters,
University College London,
Renaissance Studies

Please send nominations by January 15, 2016 to:

Fran Tise
Secretary to the Bacon Committee
M/C 101-40
California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, CA 91125
E-mail: ftise@caltech.edu

Please include:

1. A letter of nomination, one page maximum per nominee, which addresses the candidate's qualifications and potential. Please include the nominee's contact information.
2. A copy of the nominee's curriculum vitae.

AWARDS

The International Balzan Foundation is pleased to announce the winners of this year's Prizes and the subject areas for next year

2015 Balzan Prizes

for History of European Art (1300–1700)
Hans Belting (Germany)

for Astroparticle Physics including neutrino and gamma-ray observation
Francis Halzen (Belgium/USA)

for Oceanography
David Michael Karl (USA)

for Economic History
Joel Mokyr (USA/Israel)

The 2015 Balzan Awards Ceremony was held in Bern at the Federal Palace on Friday 13 November 2015.

On the day before the ceremony, the **Balzan Prizewinners Interdisciplinary Forum 2015**, organized in collaboration with the Swiss Academies of Sciences, was held at the Berner Generationen Haus.

The Amount of the Prize and Research Projects
The amount of each 2015 prize is 750,000 Swiss Francs, half of which must be set aside by the Prizewinner for research projects, preferably involving young researchers.

2016 Balzan Prizes

worth 750,000 Swiss francs each, will be awarded in the fields of:

Comparative Literature
International Relations: History and Theory

**Molecular and Cellular Neuroscience,
including neurodegenerative and developmental aspects**

Applied Photonics

Nominations—by universities or learned societies—must be submitted to the General Prize Committee of the International Balzan Foundation by 15 March 2016.

Supporting documentation required:

- Justification for the candidate's nomination, including a list of his/her most important publications
- Complete biography with date and place of birth, nationality, addresses, recent photo, present position/function, main academic activities

Self-nominations are not accepted.

Contact address:

Chairman of the General Prize Committee
Professor Salvatore Veca
International Balzan Foundation "Prize"
Piazzetta Umberto Giordano 4, I-20122
Milano, Italy
Tel. +39-02-7600-2212, Fax +39-02-7600-9457
e-mail: balzan@balzan.it

Aims and activities of the Balzan Foundation
The Balzan Foundation, which is international in character and scope, acts jointly through two Foundations: one under Italian jurisdiction and the other under Swiss jurisdiction.

The International E. Balzan Prize Foundation "Prize", with a registered office in Milan, has the aim to promote, throughout the world, culture, science, and the most meritorious initiatives in the cause of humanity, peace, and fraternity among peoples, regardless of nationality, race, or creed. This aim is attained through the annual award of four prizes in the sciences, humanities, and social sciences. Nominations for these prizes are received at the Foundation's request from the world's leading learned societies. Candidates are selected by the General Prize Committee, composed of eminent European scholars and scientists. At intervals of not less than three years, the Balzan Foundation also awards a "Prize for Humanity, Peace and Fraternity among Peoples".

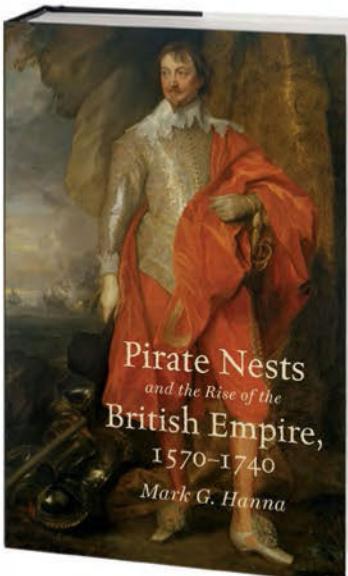
The International E. Balzan Prize Foundation "Fund", with a registered office in Zurich, administers Eugenio Balzan's estate.

Unlike other international prizes, the Balzan Prizes are awarded in different subject areas every year. Thus support is given to emerging fields of academic research, as well as to other important fields of study that are often overlooked by other renowned prizes.

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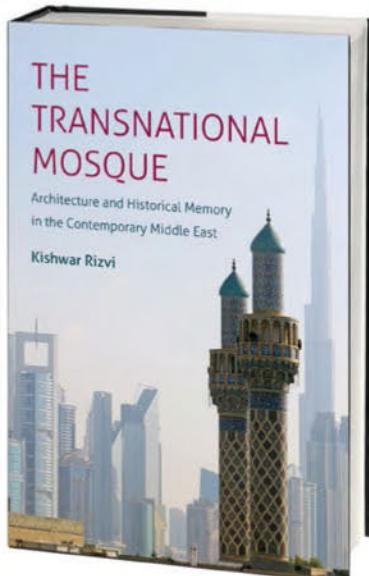
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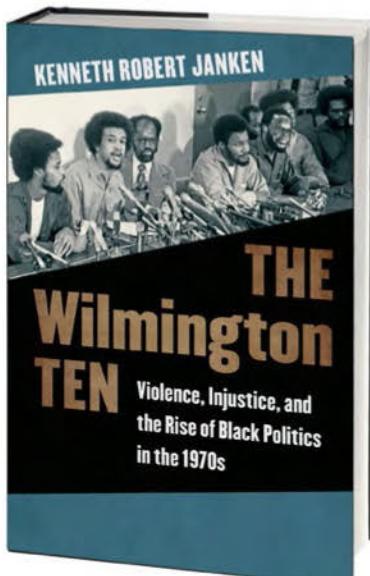
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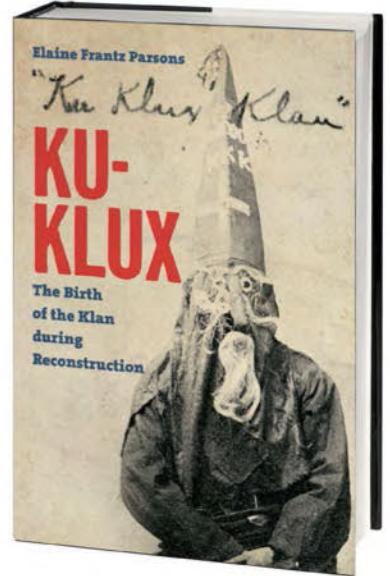
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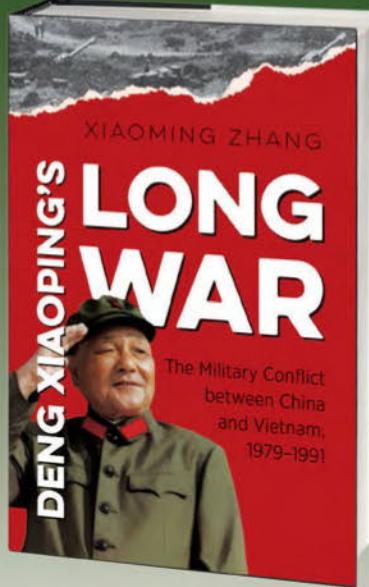
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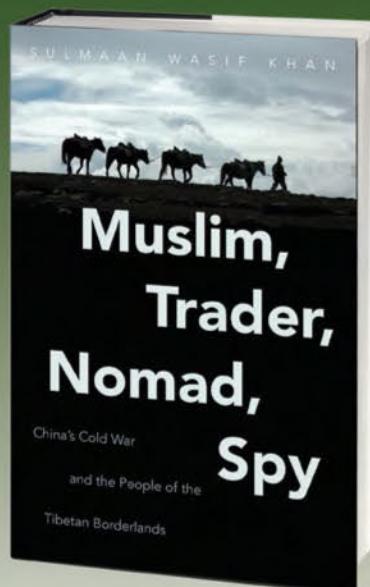
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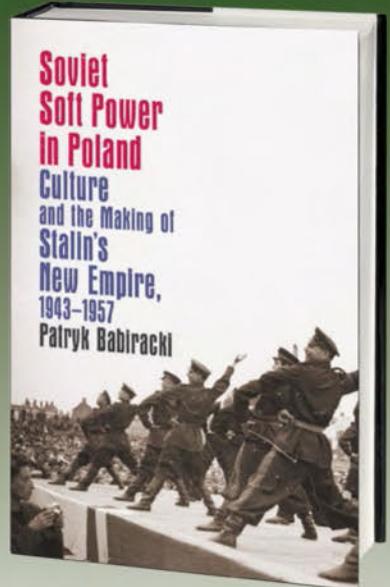
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